

How to Apply for a Federal Job

Career Services

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WHY WORK FOR THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT?

(Partnership for Public Service, 2009)

1. THE NATION'S LARGEST EMPLOYER IS HIRING

| • 2. FEDERAL SERVICE IS PUBLIC SER | Innovation in government and a retiring boomer generation mean thousands of federal opportunities. |
|--|--|
| • 3. FEDERAL JOBS PAY BETTER THAN | Looking for a way to make a difference in the lives of Americans and your community? As a federal employee, you would play a vital role in addressing pressing issues, from homelessness to homeland security. N YOU THINK |
| • 4. THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT CAN | Low federal pay is a myth. Federal salaries are actually competitive with the private sector, plus there are great benefits, job stability and opportunities for advancement. N HELP PAY FOR SCHOOL |
| • • 5. YOU CAN DEVELOP A UNIQUE SKI | Federal agencies may help you pay back up to \$10,000 per year of your student loans. Some agencies may pick up the tab if you decide to pursue a graduate degree. ILL SET |
| • | The federal government offers cutting-edge training and professional development, from information technology to foreign language immersion. |
| 6. THERE ARE FEDERAL JOBS AROU • 7. THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT VAI | ND THE COUNTRY AND AROUND THE WORLD More than 85% of federal jobs are outside the D.C. area. Looking to go global? More than 50,000 federal employees work abroad. LUES DIVERSITY |
| • 8. THERE ARE JOBS FOR EVERY INT | Federal agencies actively encourage minorities and individuals with disabilities to consider government service through a variety of internship and fellowship programs. EREST AND MAJOR |
| • 9. FEDERAL JOBS PROMOTE GREAT | Not a political science major? Not a problem. There are federal jobs suited to every interest and skill, from art history to zoology. WORK/LIFE BALANCE |
| • 10. YOU CAN GAIN A PROFESSIONAL | Flexible work schedules, world class benefit packages and other incentives facilitate a high quality of life, both in and out of the office. EDGE |
| | |

• With more than 160 agencies, federal employees have a leg up in moving between agencies and positions after three years on the job.

STEPS TO FINDING A FEDERAL JOB

(Partnership for Public Service, 2009)

FINDING FEDERAL JOB POSTINGS

The U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) is a good place to start your search. By law, most government agencies must post any vacancies open to outside applicants on their Web site—USAJOBS.gov. Because not all government jobs are posted on USAJOBS, however, it's also important to visit the Web sites of those agencies with which you might like to work. Here are some tips on using USAJOBS.

Need to find a job in your region? There are a few ways to determine which agencies are in your region:

- USAjobs.gov
- The Blue Pages of your phone book
- Contacting the Federal Executive Office that coordinates federal offices for your region
- Use Fedscope to research which agencies are in your state and whether they hire people with your background by clicking on "employment" and the most recent data (month/year) on the federal workforce

THE APPLICATION PROCESS

After selecting the job to which you'd like to apply, we encourage you to consider the following tips:

Plan ahead

The application process itself can take time; to improve your chances of getting a job, be sure to allow plenty of time to thoroughly complete your application.

Select carefully

Applications tailored for specific jobs that are a good match for your skills and talents will be more successful than sending out a standard resume for many jobs. Make sure to read about building your federal resume and KSA writing before you apply.

Prepare for a wait

It can take *weeks to months* before you will hear back about an application and there may be little or no communication from the agency. Every federal job requires a background check before being offered the position. If the position is related to national security, you will be instructed to complete the security clearance process once you receive an offer. This can prolong this time period. Apply for positions without security clearances about four months prior to your start date and six to eight months in advance for national security related positions.

Follow-up with the agency

Contact the identified representative to learn the status of an application or to find out more about a job about a month after the closing date or if the closing date is extended, about a month after you turned in your application.

THE APPLICATION

To apply, you must usually submit:

- A resume
- A description of relevant knowledge
- Your knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) essays, other essays or online questionnaire (depending on what the application asks for)
- A cover letter
- Additional supporting information called for in the vacancy announcement

The information currently on your resume may not be enough to satisfy government employers. OPM's "Applying for a Federal Job" booklet lists all the information an applicant needs to provide for federal employment. You can edit and store up to five federal resumes at usajobs.gov. A resume containing all the required information is called a "federal resume," although there is no mandated form. Federal resumes require more detail than standard resumes. A recent graduate's federal resume can be two to three pages long!

Essentials include:

- Information about the opening
- Your personal information
- Education and coursework levels
- Work experience (including dates of employment, number of hours worked per week, location of position and a supervisor's contact information)
- Other qualifications

Agencies also request eligibility information including:

- Past or current federal employment
- Veteran qualifications
- Non-competitive appointment: Peace Corps and AmeriCorps

A GUIDE TO FEDERAL RESUME WRITING

(Partnership for Public Service, 2009)

Your federal resume can be different from your private sector resume in a few ways:

- Generally lengthier ranging from one to five pages
- Qualifications used to confirm eligibility by HR rather than just get an interview
- Requires additional information

Sections in a Federal resume:

- Candidate information
- Work experience
- Education
- References
- Affiliations
- Desired locations

Building Your Resume Using USAJOBS

After you click on the "Create a Resume" button and register with the <u>USAJOBS</u> Web site, you'll see that the resume-building process has four basic steps: Getting Started, Experience, Related Information, and Finishing Up. At any point during this process, you can click the "Save For Later" button at the bottom of the page and return to your resume at a later time. As you complete the resume building process, keep an eye out for blue circles with question marks inside, as these can help explain the step you're working on.

GETTING STARTED

On the Getting Started page, you'll be asked for your basic contact information. Be sure to fill out all of those boxes marked with a red asterisk (they're mandatory). The one major decision you face here is whether to make your resume confidential or non-confidential. Marking your resume as confidential will prevent federal recruiters from easily learning your current contact information and employer. If a federal recruiter is interested in your resume, they'll send you a message through USAJOBS and you'll have the option to give them that information. Marking your resume as confidential will not hide the entire document from federal recruiters — you'll have the chance to do that later.

EXPERIENCE

The Experience section is where you will list your career experience and educational achievements. Fill out both the work experience and education sections with a single record at a time. Once you click "Add Work Experience" or "Add Education" buttons, you'll be able to add information about other jobs you may have had or schools you may have attended. At the bottom of the Experience page, there's an optional section that will allow you to list any job related training you may have had. If you've taken relevant courses or attended valuable training sessions, be sure to include them here!

RELATED INFORMATION

The Related Information tab provides another opportunity for you to add information about yourself that recruiters may value. List personal and professional references, languages you speak, organizations to which you belong, publications to which you have contributed and awards which you have received on this page.

- Toward the bottom of the page, you'll notice that the site asks you what type of employment you'd be willing to consider. This choice may seem daunting at first, but don't fret if you click the question mark next to the word "Availability," you'll find short descriptions of each of these job types. Read these descriptions and you'll be able to make an informed decision about what sort of job you're looking for.
- Below the "Availability" section, you'll find the "Desired Locations" box that will allow you to let federal recruiters know of any geographic preferences you have. Feel free to select as many or as few locations as you like.

FINISHING UP

Once you click through to the Finishing Up page, you'll have the option to automatically spellcheck your resume. This is a good idea since spelling errors reflect poorly on job applicants. This is also a good time to click the "Preview Your Resume" button along the left side of the page. You'll be able to see your resume just as federal recruiters will see it.

- After you're satisfied with the shape your resume is in, click the "Activate Resume" button. This will send your resume out into the pool of other applicants and allow federal recruiters to find it in their searches.
- Whether you decide to make your resume searchable or not, you'll be able to use it if you find a position on USAJOBS that accepts online applications. Look for the "Apply Online" button at the bottom of a job posting to see if the position you're interested in qualifies. If you decide to submit your resume electronically, make sure to read the job description carefully to ensure that all of the information that it asks for is included in your resume.

FEDERAL RESUME WRITING FACTS

- Do not assume anything-include it, and use keywords. Do not assume that the HR reviewer will understand that you have a certain skill if it's not clearly written in your resume. State your skills clearly and concisely, and include everything that is important.
- Add the details. For federal HR staff more detail is needed to describe the job description.
- One resume fits all. Most of the online resume databases will allow you to submit only one resume at a time. That's why it is recommended that you write one resume that covers the skills for your target positions, even if you have 2 or 3 target positions.

SAMPLE FEDERAL RESUME

(Partnership for Public Service, 2009)

Abraham Lincoln

1111 President Drive Washington, DC, 20005

Evening Phone: 202-200-2222 alincoln@pastpresidents.com

| Personal Profile | Country of Citizenship: United States of America Veterans' Preference: No Highest Grade: GS-02-7, 06/20XX-08/20XX Contact Current Employer: Yes | |
|-------------------|--|--|
| Availability | Job Type: Permanent/Temporary Promotion/ Federal Career I | ntern |
| | Work Schedule: Full Time | |
| Desired Locations | US-DC-Washington/Metro | |
| | US-VA-Northern | |
| Work Experience | Virginia Cooperative Extension Program Coordinator Salary: 20 USD Per Hour Hours per week: 40-Oversee three mentoring programs in limit -Recruit, train, and manage 25 adult mentors and 30 youth -Develop marketing and training materials for use in FMP prog- mentoring initiatives -Write and manage program grants, hire outside contractors for -Communicate in Spanish with program participants and their Yes, Supervisor's Name: Clyde Jackson, Supervisor's Phone: 7 U.S. Consulate (Department of State) Political and Economic Section Intern Grade Level: NA Hours per week: 45 -Researched and wrote regional economic and political briefs f consulate district visits -Worked with Italian professionals in regional chambers of con government offices to compile briefs -Utilized Italian language skills and political and cultural know (Contact Supervisor: Yes, Supervisor's Name: Lisa Miller, Sup Wash. DC) | grams and other county r grant implementation families (Contact Supervisor: 03-324-5369) Milan, Lombardy Italy 6/20XX- 8/20XX |
| | Department of State (Educational and Cultural Affairs) Intern then Public Affairs Assistant Grade level: 02 Hours per week: 20 -Wrote articles in Bureau newsletter & press releases -Drafted memoranda for the Undersecretary of State -Supervised contractors on communications project -Contacted and pitched media for program publicity -Assembled financial and budget information for use in ECA m Yes, Supervisor's Name: Nina Bishop, Supervisor's Phone: 202 | |

| Educational Background | University of Virginia Charlottesville, VA US Bachelor's Degree- 5/20XX 121 Semester Hours Major: Foreign Affairs, Italian Language (double major) GPA: 3.50 out of 4.0 |
|------------------------|--|
| Language Skills | Italian Spoken: Advanced Written: Advanced Read: Advanced Spoken: Advanced Written: Advanced Read: Advanced |
| Affiliations | Member- National Italian American Foundation |
| References | George Washington GWU Professor, Italian Language and Literature Phone Number: 202-777-3333 Reference Type: Personal |
| Additional Information | Skills: Strong written and oral communication skills Strong analytical abilities and problem solving capabilities Grant writing experience (awarded "Dream Catchers" Program Grant by Community and Recreation Services, Fairfax County Government, Dec. 2006) Regional expertise in Balkan, Post-Soviet, and Western European political issues (including extensive regional travel and language capabilities) Proficient in Microsoft Office programs |
| | Leadership and Service Roles: |
| | Kaleidoscope Center for Cultural Fluency at UVA: Social Diversity Program, Director Sep. '04- May 05 |
| | -Developed forums for dialogue between diverse student groups -Built partnerships between student groups through cultural programming |
| | Societ'a Italiana (Italian Society) at UVA, President Sep. '04-May '05 -Recruited executive committee members, planned meetings, managed a membership base of 40+ students -Organized club involvement in national Italian-American collegiate workshops and events -Created community events with local Italian businesses and restaurants |
| | Other Roles at the University of Virginia: Council of the College of Arts & Sciences Italian Department Representative Sep. '04-May '05 International Residence College: Academic Affairs, Committee Chair Sep. '03-May '04 Jefferson Literary and Debating Society: Elected Member Jan. '05-May '06 European Society: Culture Chair Jan. '04-Jan '05 St. Anthony's Catholic Church, Falls Church, VA: Substitute Instructor, ESI, Present |
| | St. Anthony's Catholic Church, Falls Church, VA: Substitute Instructor, ESL Present |

A GUIDE TO KSA WRITING

(KSA = KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND ABILITIES)

(Partnership for Public Service, 2009)

So you found your dream job on USAJOBS.gov. In addition to sending in a federal resume, you must submit KSA essays or complete a questionnaire. Each application usually has four to six KSA statements that applicants answer in first person narrative paragraphs with reallife examples. Be sure to include as much information as you can that responds to each KSA factor, even if that information is already included on your federal resume.

Step 1: Practice Studying Job Announcements

Look at a random job announcement from usajobs.gov. Focus on the "requirements,""skills" or "qualifications" sections of job ads, and look for "buzzwords" and desirable credentials for your ideal job. Highlight the buzzwords or the frequently mentioned words. You'll want to use these in your KSA. Then, circle the KSA factors. Now, you are ready to print out a job announcement you want to apply to and highlight the buzzwords and key words. Make a list of words to use in your KSA.

Step 2: Take Credit for ALL of Your Experiences

Brainstorm all the ways you gain knowledge, skills and abilities.

- Class Papers, Exams, Presentations, Projects
- Summer Jobs, Internships, Work Study, Volunteering
- Student Government, Clubs, Hobbies, Family Life, Clubs, Religious Organizations

Step 3: Use the CCAR Method to Write a KSA

KSAs include several examples, so you can put a few CCAR paragraphs together to form each complete KSA. Answer each KSA a half page to one page response. This may mean you give two to three example paragraphs.

<u>C</u>ONTEXT

• Describe the specific problem you had to address (What did you have to solve, resolve, respond to, handle, etc.)

<u>C</u>HALLENGES

• Describe the factors that contributed to a particular challenge such as budget cuts, new legislation, institutional reform, new goals from upper management, etc.

<u>A</u>CTION

• Describe the steps you took to solve the problem

<u>R</u>ESULT

• Outcomes of your actions- where possible, use numbers to highlight your accomplishment. Think time and money.

Step 4: Tips for Writing KSAs

- Pay attention to keywords in the job announcement. Highlight keywords or phrases describing the position. Then use those buzz words in your response.
- Connect your experiences with 2-3 CCAR paragraphs for each KSA by selecting items that best illustrate the KSA.
- Be concise. Each KSA should be a half a page to a page in length. Make sure the reader can quickly scan for your accomplishments. Do they jump off the page?
- Check that you have addressed the KSA (Did you follow CCAR?)
- Proofread your answers. Make sure they are succinct and easy to read. Use plain language and don't use acronyms.
- Use another set of eyes. Your reader should make sure that you have included all of your relevant experiences, that your responses flow well and contain no grammatical errors.
- Put each individual KSA on a separate piece of paper.

A SAMPLE KSA

Example of a Poor Response

My communication skills are excellent. I am often asked to help out in this regard and have been commended for my work.

Example of a Better Response

In the past 10 months, I have taken over a number of writing assignments previously held by my supervisor:

- I have been drafting monthly reports on leasing activities under the purview of our office. These are routinely approved by my supervisor without change and are circulated to 10 field offices and Regional Directors.
- I have assumed the responsibility of reporter for the quarterly meeting of the bureau's Research Directors. Reports of these meetings are reviewed by the Director's Office prior to distribution to all participants.
- In January, I completed the course, "Writing Analytical Reports," offered through the National Independent Study Center. This was a six-month course involving 24 hours of training and covering such areas as: planning an analytical report; collecting and analyzing data; identifying possible solutions to problems addressed in the report; and organizing, writing, and editing the report.

In addition, while I was a student in college I developed and was recognized for my strong written communication skills in a variety of capacities:

- After my junior year, I was selected for a summer internship with my state representative, for whom I drafted constituent correspondence and press releases. Though I was an intern, the majority of the letters and press releases I wrote were sent out without modification.
- During my senior year, I served as the chapter president of my honor society, and routinely wrote progress reports to send to the headquarters of the honor society.
- Throughout college I was a staff writer for the student daily newspaper. As a reporter I wrote both short news stories as well as in-depth feature articles on a weekly basis, and was selected for the feature writing award by the editorial board my junior year.

FEDERAL STUDENT PROGRAMS

There are several programs that help students get their foot in the door and receive a valuable experience with a federal agency. These programs are for students and recent graduates and range from summer internships to two year commitments.

Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP)

The STEP, another name for a temporary internship with a federal agency, is a great way for students to be exposed to the government. STEP positions are paid positions that can range from a summer job to a position that lasts as long as the student is in school. It is not necessary for the work to be related to the student's academic major, which allows the student to gain experience in a variety of fields. Students enrolled in high school, a two-year or four-year college or university, a technical or vocational school, or a graduate program, are eligible to apply. The program requires that the student be a U.S. citizen. http://www.opm.gov/employ/students/intro.asp

Student Career Experience Program (SCEP)

SCEP positions, which are for undergraduate and graduate students, are substantive internships in federal agencies. The work must be related to the student's area of study and requires the agency to have a formal commitment with the student's institution. Most positions are paid, and the student may also receive academic credit. If the student successfully completes 640 hours of work, he or she can be appointed to a permanent position without going through the traditional hiring process. This program requires its students to be U.S. citizens.

http://www.opm.gov/employ/students/intro.asp

Presidential Management Fellows Program (PMF)

The highly competitive PMF program is an excellent way to launch a career in the federal government upon completion of a graduate program. These are two-year positions in which fellows have the opportunity to complete rotational assignments and receive extensive training. The application deadline is in early fall of the final year of graduate school, and students must be nominated by their school. http://www.pmf.opm.gov/

Federal Career Intern Program (FCIP)

FCIP is designed to help agencies attract outstanding undergraduate and graduate students to a variety of entry-level paid positions. These are two-year, full-time commitments, and are not short-term internships. They involve various development and training programs, often grouping new FCIPs into a cohort. Upon successful completion of the program, participants may be eligible for permanent placement within an agency. Individuals interested in Career Intern opportunities should contact the specific agency directly. Agencies control their own FCIP hiring process and may restrict the selection pool to certain schools. http://www.opm.gov/careerintern/

Websites to help with the internship search:

www.StudentJobs.gov

- The government's web site which lists student opportunities and entry-level positions
- Have automated job alerts sent to an email account
- Find entry-level positions by searching for GS-5 to GS-7 listings

www.makingthedifference.org/federalinternships/directory

• Learn more about different student programs available in government and search the Federal Internship Directory for internship listings

(Partnership for Public Service, 2008)

THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT CAN HELP PAY FOR SCHOOL!

You should know that the federal government can provide loan repayment assistance for top candidates, and offers special scholarship and fellowship programs that pay for undergraduate and graduate schooling.

Loan Repayment Assistance

Federal agencies were authorized in 2001 to provide loan repayment assistance to top candidates and employees. In 2002, 16 agencies participated, with the State Department and General Accounting Office providing the most loan repayment. Eight other agencies indicated that they plan to use the program in the near future.

www.opm.gov/oca/PAY/StudentLoan/HTML/Report.ASP

 \star \$10,000: The amount of loan repayment assistance the federal government may now offer per year to employees if they sign up for a three-year commitment

 \star \$60,000: The total amount that a federal agency may offer for each individual employee, with a three-year commitment

 \star \$3.1 Million: The total amount of loan repayment the government provided in 2002 – and this is expected to increase in future years

Programs That Pay You ... to Be a Student

Many agencies offer specialized scholarship and fellowship programs to encourage students to work for the federal government. Here are some examples:

Scholarship for Service Program: Students studying information assurance at select schools can receive tuition, room and board and stipends for the final two years of undergraduate studies or for a master's degree. In exchange for the scholarship, students agree to work for the federal government for a period equivalent to the length of the scholarship.

www.opm.gov/hr/employ/products/recruitment/Scholarship/scholarshipmain.htm

The Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Science To Achieve Results (STAR) Graduate Fellowship Program: STAR awards 60 graduate education fellowships for mastersand doctoral-level students each year to encourage promising students to obtain advanced degrees and pursue careers in environmental fields. www.epa.gov/epahome/intern.htm

National Security Education Program (NSEP): NSEP awards scholarships to undergraduates for study abroad in areas critical to the country's national security. The program also provides fellowships to students in graduate programs to develop expertise in the languages and cultures of less commonly studied countries. NSEP awardees agree to work for a federal agency involved in national security affairs after graduation. www.ndu.edu/nsep/

Howard Hughes Medical Institute / National Institutes of Health Research Scholars **Program:** Each year 42 medical and dental students spend nine months to a year conducting biomedical research with senior NIH scientists through the HHMI/NIH Research Scholars Program. Scholars receive a salary while living in a residential community with other participants and are eligible for a scholarship for their remaining year or two of school. www.hhmi.org/research/cloister/index.html

(Partnership for Public Service, 2009)

IDENTIFYING YOUR FEDERAL SALARY

The federal government utilizes the General Schedule (GS) pay scale and pay banding system to determine salary. You can identify your appropriate income level based on the information listed below:

GS Pay Scale- contains 15 grades from GS-1 through GS-15. Each grade has 10 steps and each step signals a pay increase due to an increased skill and knowledge in the job.

- ✤ A college graduate with a bachelor's degree and no previous experience can expect to start at the GS-5 level
- Students who meet the criteria for Superior Academic Achievement or have finished a year of graduate school but did not receive a degree may start at the GS-7 level
- ♦ A college graduate with a master's degree typically starts at the **GS-9** grade
- ✤ A Ph.D. will make you eligible for jobs at GS-11

The Three Ways to Qualify for **Superior Academic Achievement** designation:

- 1. Class standing- must be in the upper third of your graduating class in your college, university, or major subdivision
- 2. Grade point average- 3.0/4.0 recorded on your transcript or 3.5 or higher out of 4.0 based on the average of the required courses completed in the major field or the required courses in the major field completed during the final 2 years of curriculum
- 3. Election to a membership in a National Honor Society- freshman honor society does not meet this requirement

(Partnership for Public Service, 2009)

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT RESOURCES

Making the Difference: http://makingthedifference.org/index.shtml

Take a closer look at the federal service by searching this website for entry-level openings, federal internships, and searching by your major to find job profiles that fit your skills and interests.

U.S. Office of Personnel Management: http://www.fedscope.opm.gov/

✤ A database of federal employment used to find out which agencies and federal jobs exist in your state.

Where the Jobs Are: http://www.wherethejobsare.org

- Mission Critical Occupations (MCOs) are areas where an agency must fill positions to accomplish the mission of the agency. Under this website, agencies reported they will need to fill 274,000 MCO positions in the next 3 years. Mission critical hiring is concentrated in the following occupational areas:
 - Medical & Public Health
 - Security & Protection
 - Compliance & Enforcement
 - Legal
 - Administration/Program Management

Best Places to Work in the Federal Government: http://www.bestplacestowork.org

All federal agencies can be a good place to work, but based on the opinions of federal employees, some are better than others. Based on data from 221,000 civil servants, *Best Places to Work in the Federal Government* ranks 283 federal agencies and subcomponents according to job satisfaction.

StudentJobs.gov Guide: http://www.studentjobs.gov/

On this Web site you will find positions for high school, undergraduate, graduate level and recent graduate internships and jobs with the federal government. Agencies are not mandated to post openings, so also search on the specific agency Web site.

The Federal Government's Official Job Site: <u>http://www.usajobs.gov/</u>

It's your one-stop source for Federal jobs and employment information. You can search job descriptions by location, agency, job category or keyword.

The U.S. Government's Official Web Portal: <u>http://www.usa.gov/</u>

Search an a-z listing of federal agencies.

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