



INDUSTRY OVERVIEW: GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC SERVICE

What is government and public service work?

Some 20 million people work for government agencies and departments that, on a federal, state, or local level, handle issues as diverse as highway construction, public transportation, the protection of wilderness areas, education, public health programs, subsidies to tobacco farmers, the space program, and fireworks displays on the Fourth of July. Governments collect taxes and use them to fund programs and services. Also affiliated with this type of work are volunteer or service programs based both domestically and internationally which support the philanthropic mission of the government, such as the PeaceCorps.

Nearly every type of position, including financial analysts, lawyers, engineers, social workers, accountants, and others that are found in the business sector can also work in the public sector. Governments employ armies of civil servants, bureaucrats, and specialists of all kinds to implement their policies and staff their programs. These include people who analyze policy and draft legislation for U.S. senators, people who issue building permits at town hall, and everyone in between. Many occupations can be found within the government on all levels; it just takes research and diligence to find the position that fits one's interests. Some of these options are detailed below.

Working for the government generally provides a stable work environment with regular hours and personal flexibility when it comes to holidays and time off. Usually, very good benefits, retirement plans, and pension packages are offered. There are exceptions to this, such as a political aide, who may experience instability around elections, or some programs that depend on funding, which can be cut from time to time. In general, it is less likely that one would lose one's job working for the government than lose it working for the private sector. The challenge and mission of a federal agency can be exciting, but many employees state that the politics and bureaucracy can be frustrating. Due to the scope and the public accountability of government agencies, there are many policies and procedures associated with this type of work.

Common Government Agencies/Departments

Congressional Budget Office
Metropolitan Transit Authority/Port Authority
Department of Homeland Security
National museums (i.e., Smithsonian)
Department of State
Department of the Treasury
Department of Transportation
Department of Veteran's Affairs
Environmental Protection Agency
National Archives and Records Administration
Congress/Elected representatives (federal, state, and local)
Immigrations and Customs Enforcement Bureau

Army Corps of Engineers
Federal Bureau of Investigation
Internal Revenue Service
Local law enforcement
Parks department
Department of Defense
International Trade Commission
Federal Trade Commission
Office of Government Ethics
Public libraries
Department of Education
Department of Justice

Career Tracks

Environmental Specialist: The primary responsibility of an Environmental Specialist is to gather environmental data for interpretation and/or to maintain regulatory compliance standards. The job often involves reviewing permits, investigating complaints, and gathering and interpreting data. The data are often used to make policy or write rules. These professionals may also be involved in conflict resolution, where they meet with attorneys, hold hearings, or even appear in court. These jobs are often political in nature and can include balancing the goals of environmental protection with restrictions placed on the agency by those with a political agenda. Areas of specialization include: air pollution, surface/drinking water regulation, hazardous waste regulation, emergency and remedial response, pollution prevention, and public education. Jobs in this area require a background in the sciences, attention to detail, and strong communication skills.

Foreign Service Officer: Foreign Service Officers (FSOs) advocate American foreign policy, protect American citizens, and promote American business interests throughout the world. FSOs staff our embassies, consulates and other diplomatic missions devoted to strengthening peace, stability, and prosperity. Their perceptiveness, dedication, and creativity drive the formulation and achievement of American foreign policy objectives. Recently, transnational issues gained stature among these objectives, including topics such as the environment, science and technology; the global struggle against diseases such as AIDS; international law enforcement cooperation; counter narcotics trafficking; counter proliferation and international action against human trafficking. Working in this aspect of the government requires a great deal of independence, strong communication skills (both oral and written), and the ability to work as a member of a collaborative team.

Public Affairs Specialist: This sector of the government includes positions responsible for administering, supervising, or performing work involved in establishing and maintaining mutual communication between Federal agencies and the general public. Positions in this arena advise agencies on policy formulation and the potential public reaction to proposed policy and coordinate public communication. The majority of public affairs work involves identifying communication needs and developing informational materials that inform appropriate groups of the agency's policies, programs, services, and activities. Then, specialists must plan, execute, and evaluate the information and communications programs in furthering agency goals. Work in this sector requires skills in written and oral communications, analysis, and interpersonal relations.

Criminal Investigators and Special Agents: There are a number of occupations that fall under this category including Special Agent, Criminal Investigator, Investigator, and FBI Agent. They investigate alleged or suspected criminal violations of federal, state, or local laws to determine if evidence is sufficient to recommend prosecution. Some specific tasks found in this field include obtaining and verifying evidence by interviewing and observing suspects and witnesses or by analyzing records, examining records in order to locate links in chains of evidence or information, preparing reports that detail investigation findings, testifying before grand juries concerning criminal activity investigations, and analyzing evidence in laboratories or in the field. This is a diverse field with a spectrum of positions at the local through federal levels acting in many capacities with potential to move into supervisory or even political roles. This field requires great focus on detail, an affinity for logic, solid collaboration skills, and strong written and verbal communication skills.

Legislative Staff Assistant: The primary responsibilities of the staff assistant tend more toward administrative work. This is usually the first person a visitor sees upon entering the office. Responsibilities include greeting guests, arranging tours of the Capitol, opening and sorting the mail, and answering the phone. However, staff assistants will also have the opportunity to assist the more senior staff in a variety of areas and learn the ropes on Capitol Hill. By learning the fundamentals of the position, assistants will have more time to put their education to use. Staff assistants often have the chance to work with other assistants to research legislation and other issues, take on special projects for the chief of staff, or help the press secretary by proofreading speeches and organizing media lists.

Political Aide: Behind every successful politician is an aide. Aides, a term which encompasses a variety of positions from policy wonks to press secretaries, interact with the public, represent politicians at public meetings, and occasionally speak on the political figures' behalf. Aides are the politicians' public relations officers, trusted advisors, and personal secretaries. In short, a politician's aide is his or her right hand. This position requires a great deal of time management, organization, and communication skills.

IRS Budget Analyst: An IRS Budget Analyst in one of the government's technical functions is responsible for formulating and/or executing a division's entire business plan and annual budget. Analysts formulate, monitor, and execute the budget for the assigned program areas, assessing resource justifications and advising management of the financial impact of various business decisions. Analysts develop options for allocating resources among critical program areas and draft proposals to adjust resource distribution according to changing needs, unfunded mandates, and other events during the fiscal year. This position helps prepare funding proposals for future fiscal years, focusing on the needs of the agency and objectives of IRS leadership. They also help prepare responses to Treasury and Congressional oversight committees. Professionals in this field must be detail-oriented and have strong time management skills.

Additional Career Paths

Director of Fundraising/Development
Director of Government Relations
AmeriCorps/Peace Corps
Customs Official
Law Enforcement

Director of Volunteers
Policy Consultant
Intelligence Analyst
Immigration Officer
Engineer

Requirements/Skills

Many positions within the government are highly sought after with large and competitive candidate pools. Interning within these organizations can help get a foot in the door and gain exposure to the various parts of the field. Most positions require a Bachelor's degree in a related field, and some require continued training in specific skills. Some entry-level positions require employees to take the Civil Service Exam. The Civil Service Exam is a written test that measures preparedness for work within the government. This is typically only used in entry-level positions, as promotions are usually based on merit, education, and experience. To enter the field, there is a variety of applicable majors depending on the specific area of government. For the political side, a person may benefit from a political science degree; someone working for the Treasury would be best served by a degree in finance; and a person working for the Environmental Protection Agency may have a biology background. There is a great diversity in this industry, and a person must research the specific area to find the best match for his or her interests and education.

Special Programs

IPA Washington Summer Internship Program (through Orthodox Union): An opportunity for students to experience Capitol Hill through the Orthodox Union each summer. See their website for more information about this exciting program: <http://www.ou.org/public/interns/default.htm>.

Salary

Salary levels are based on grades within the government and the figures below roughly reflect those grades. Salaries are not dependent on the success of the economy like many jobs in the corporate world are, and they have the additional benefit of regular business hours, great benefits, a reliable pension, and holiday pay. ***The following are general estimates for entry-level professionals. Salaries will vary based on experience, location, and branch of government.*** For an overview of salary grades and salary information for specific occupations not listed below, visit the U.S. Office of Personnel Management's website at www.opm.gov.

Human Resources Manager: \$70,000-\$130,000
Environmental Conservation: \$26,000-\$48,000
Public Affairs Specialist: \$30,000-\$80,000
International Research Program Associate: \$35,000-\$50,000

Development Coordinator: \$40,000
Budget Analyst: \$40,000-\$90,000
Political Aide: \$35,000

Professional Associations

Government Finance Officers Association: www.gfoa.org
National Conference of State Legislatures: www.ncsl.org
Public Citizen: www.citizen.org
Sustainable Communities Network: www.sustainable.org
American Public Works Association: www.apwa.net
National Association of Counties: www.naco.org
Council of State Governments: www.csg.org
International IDEA: The Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance: www.idea.int

Publications

The Book of U.S. Government Jobs, by Dennis V. Damp
Roll Call (Capitol Hill newspaper)

Websites

www.usajobs.gov
www.govtjobs.com
www.makingthedifference.org
www.careersingovernment.com
<http://fedworld.ntis.gov>
<http://fedcareer.info>
<http://federaljobs.net>
www.jobsfed.com
www.socialservice.com
www.rollcall.com
www.opm.gov

www.nyc.gov
www.envirocitizen.org
www.foundationcenter.org
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www.peacecorps.gov
www.execsearches.com
www.cs.ny.gov
www.epa.gov
www.idealists.org
www.careers.state.gov

References used in compiling this resource: www.vault.com; www.wetfeet.com The Ohio State University, School of Agriculture: <http://www.ag.ohio-state.edu/~envjobs/>; The Internet Public Library: www.ipl.org; www.usajobs.gov; <http://online.onetcenter.org/>; <http://choosing-careers.suite101.com/>; www.careers.state.gov