



WHERE THE JOBS ARE: APPLYING FOR FEDERAL POSITIONS

The Federal government is the only sector currently expanding its hiring with several hundred jobs becoming available in the next year alone. Working in the public service sector is rewarding, has great benefits and can bring a wonderful sense of job security in an unsure time. The following are tips to help you navigate the Federal job search and application process.

IMPORTANT WEBSITES

www.usajobs.gov and <http://www.usajobs.gov/studentjobs/>: The main job search and application website for Federal jobs. All open postings should be here, although some will also be on specific agency sites as well.

www.makingthedifference.org: The Partnership for Public Service's student website with info about agencies and major specific guides.

www.usa.gov: The government's official web page with an A-Z agency index.

www.bestplacetowork.org: The most comprehensive rating of employee satisfaction in the Fed government. Can search by demographics here to see where women, minorities, etc., rate their workplace the highest.

www.studentjobs.gov: A similar site to USAjobs.gov but for students and recent grads.

MYTHS

1. Government jobs do not pay
2. Bureaucracy and "red tape" encompass most of the job
3. Have to move to Washington DC to work for the government
4. Must be a Political Science major to even be considered

REALITIES/PERKS

1. Starting salaries for GS 5 or 7 (entry level/Bachelor's degree) are around \$40,000, which is on par with many positions in the business sector and higher than many fields. This salary usually doubles within 3-5 years (depending on performance). In addition, student loan repayment is available up to \$10,000 per year for up to 6 years.
2. VERY flexible work schedules are available. Many government agencies run fairly independently and don't have the red tape which people anticipate. This is especially true when it comes to flexible work arrangements, such as time off and working from home.
3. 84% of jobs are outside the DC metro area with 50,000 jobs abroad.
4. The government is looking for majors/experience of all types. Just as an example, recent job postings asked for an economist, anthropologist and accountant!
5. There are 1.9 million Federal employees. By 2010 half of them will be eligible to retire. Translation: many, many job opportunities are now and will continue to become available!

APPLYING

Students graduating with a BA will apply for GS-5 or GS-7 jobs. GS-5 means you have a bachelor's degree and no prior experience. GS-7 is a bachelor's degree, no experience necessarily, but high academic achievement or demonstrated leadership.

****Tip:** If the opening and closing date are 7-11 days apart it generally means that the posting was created with a candidate already in mind. DO NOT bother applying.

You can search for jobs by region, agency, “series” (which is really job function, closely related to academic major) or keyword.

The same networking, informational interview and follow up rules apply as to private sector job search.

INTERNSHIPS

The BEST way to get a job with the federal government is to start as an intern. There are several programs—the most typical is STEP (Short Term Employment Program). These will be posted on specific agency sites, so students may wish to look at www.usa.gov and www.bestplacetowork.org, identify an agency (or a few agencies) of interest, and then visit those agencies’ website to apply.

Another intern program is called SCEP, where after working 640 hours, the individual can get hired on a non-competitive basis; you must be enrolled in an academic program related to the position/agency to qualify for the SCEP placements. These are also posted on agency sites.

For both programs, you can search main usajobs.gov with STEP, SCEP or “**student program**” as a keyword. Avoid typing “intern” as a keyword, as that will bring up many unrelated full-time positions with the word “internal.”

FEDERAL RESUME

Applicants do not submit a typical resume, but rather build one through the system on usajobs.gov.

Tips for building the resume:

- The same basic components of a resume are required: personal info, education, experience, activities
- You can list unpaid work or activities in the experience section
- Applicants have control over the order in which experience is input
- Be as specific as possible using the same key words that are used in the job posting

QUESTIONNAIRE OR KSA

All jobs will ask for either a questionnaire or a KSA in lieu of a cover letter, and the job posting will specify which is needed. The questionnaire is very straightforward, and applicants **MUST** use keywords from posting to describe their experiences. Don’t be modest on the questionnaire! Candidates should really sell themselves and their experience. Use concrete examples and quantify. The questionnaire is usually through a different website (link will be given) that looks similar to a graduate school application site. Specific instructions for filling it out can be found in the job posting on usajobs.gov.

KSA= Knowledge, Skills and Abilities

KSAS are short essay questions required for many of the applications with the federal government. Applicants will be given a list of KSAs and Core Competencies for the position. For example: *excellent written and oral communication skills, leadership, and proficiency in another language*. For each of these, the applicant will write a paragraph describing their competency in these skill areas. For each skill candidates should try to come up with more than one example of a time they have used/demonstrated that skill. They should devote 1-2 paragraphs per skill.

Recommended technique for writing KSAs is CCAR:

1. **C**ontext—describe the specific problem you had to address
2. **C**hallenges—Describe the factors that contributed to a particular challenge such as budget cuts, new legislation, institutional reform, new goals from upper management, etc.
3. **A**ction—Describe the steps you took to solve the problem.
4. **R**esult—Outcomes of your actions—where possible, use numbers to highlight your accomplishment. Think time and money!

Each KSA should be no longer than one page in total! Be concise, to the point and always use keywords from job announcement.

The process of applying for positions can take some time, so be sure to plan well in advance. Many federal positions can take months from the initial application to the time an offer is presented. Visit the Career Center for more information and to get started on your application.