

GETTING INTO Government

A Guide for High Achievers



INTRODUCTION / OVERVIEW

***M**e and all my friends
We're all misunderstood
They say we stand for nothing and
There's no way we ever could*

***N**ow we see everything that's going wrong
With the world and those who lead it
We just feel like we don't have the means
To rise above and beat it*

***S**o we keep waiting
Waiting on the world to change
We keep on waiting
Waiting on the world to change*

***I**t's hard to beat the system
When we're standing at a distance
So we keep waiting
Waiting on the world to change*

- John Mayer, "Waiting on the World to Change"



This guide was made possible through funding from the [Robertson Foundation for Government](#), a nonprofit family foundation dedicated to helping government meet its talent needs by identifying, educating and motivating top U.S. graduate students to pursue federal government careers in foreign policy, national security and international affairs.

Established by the family of the late philanthropists Charles and Marie Robertson, and named in their honor, the Robertson Foundation for Government pursues a mission that was central to Mr. and Mrs. Robertson's philanthropic activities: strengthening the United States government and increasing its ability and determination to defend and extend freedom throughout the world by improving the training and education of men and women for government service, with particular emphasis on international relations and foreign affairs.



Robertson partnered in the preparation of this guide with GovLoop, the leading knowledge network for government that connects and advances the careers of nearly 70,000 public sector professionals. Through blogs, discussions, research guides, in-person events and online training, GovLoop connects government to improve government through innovative approaches and resources.

If you've ever tapped your foot or nodded your head to Mayer's song and agreed with the lyrics, this guide is a clear call for you to put away your cynicism and do something about society's challenges.

One solid first step is launching a career in government.

Now we already hear you saying, "But government is one of those institutions where I feel like I'm 'standing at a distance.' I know people who've tried to get into government, but the process is cumbersome and, after all, isn't there a hiring freeze?"

We know. That's why we created this guide - and we did it with a community-based approach.

We interviewed and surveyed current interns in government, federal agency hiring managers and college/university career counselors to get their tips - the real deal - on how to break through the barriers and land your first government gig. We also tried to extract some of the gems from the other government career-related books out there.

Specifically, we owe a great deal of appreciation to the following individuals that provided critical insight for this report:

PAUL BINKLEY, *Strategic Planning, Education, and Human Capital Consultant*

CHARLES DELUCA, *Economist, Chief Financial Office, U.S. Treasury Department*

DONNA DYER, *Director of Career Services, Duke University, Sanford School of Public Policy*

TAMARA GOLDEN, *Career Consultant, University of California San Diego's School of International Relations and Pacific Studies*

CHRIS GRANT, *International Economist, Department of the Treasury*

TONI HARRIS, *Director of Career Services & Alumni Relations, New York University, Wagner Graduate School of Public Service*

BRYAN KEMPTON, *Director, Office of Career Services and Alumni Relations, University of Maryland School of Public Policy*

HEATHER KRASNA, *Career Coach and Author of "Jobs That Matter: Find a Fulfilling Stable Career in Public Service"*

PAUL C. LIGHT, *Paulette Goddard Professor of Public Service, New York University, Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service*

JOEL MCFARLAND, *Management and Program Analyst, Department of Education*

CAMILLE ROBERTS, *Author / Federal Career Expert / Coach, CC Career Services*

MICHAEL SCHNEIDER, *Director of the Washington Public Policy Program at Syracuse University's Maxwell School of Public Policy*

DORIS TIRONE, *Human Resources Specialist, National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)*

KATHRYN TROUTMAN, *Founder / President, The Resume Place, and Author of "Federal Resume Guide Book"*

YULIA VERSHININA, *Associate Director, Office of Career Advancement at Harvard University, Kennedy School of Government*

LILY WHITEMAN, *Federal Times Columnist on "Career Matters" and Author of "How to Land a Top-Paying Federal Job"*

As we learned from these experts, it's not easy to sort through the various vacancies, translate the job descriptions into plain English and know when, who and how to contact agency officials as you move through the government hiring process. So that's how we broke down this guide:

1. **DISCOVER:** How Do I Find Government Career Opportunities?
2. **DECIPHER:** How Do I Understand the Government Hiring Process?
3. **DELIVER:** How Do I Cut Through the Crowded Field of Candidates?

These are the three main areas that we believe, if we succeed in giving you a solid understanding, will get your proverbial foot in the door with enough of a wedge to kick it open and get into government.

So that's our pledge and our challenge to you now that you have this resource available to you:

STOP TRYING TO BEAT THE SYSTEM FROM A DISTANCE.

STOP WAITING FOR THE WORLD TO CHANGE.

BREAK IN AND START WORKING FROM THE INSIDE OUT.

IT BEGINS RIGHT HERE, RIGHT NOW...AND WE'RE HERE TO HELP.

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HOW DO I FIND GOVERNMENT CAREER OPPORTUNITIES?

Where do you find government jobs? What types of opportunities are out there – from jobs to fellowships and internships to volunteer possibilities that build up your experience? This section will provide a pretty comprehensive answer to those questions.

Of course, the answers depend on the level of government where you are trying to make a difference. Right from the start, we can share with you a few websites that are helpful resources:

FEDERAL

[USAJOBS.gov](https://www.usajobs.gov)
[Jobs.GovLoop.com](https://www.jobs.govloop.com)
[TomManatosJobs.com/](https://www.tommanatosjobs.com/)

STATE

[50StateJobs.com](https://www.50statejobs.com)
[Career One Stop](https://www.careeronestop.com)
[GovtJobs.com](https://www.govtjobs.com)
[Careers in Government](https://www.careersingovernment.com)

LOCAL

[GovJobs.com](https://www.govjobs.com)
[ICMA Career Network](https://www.icma.org/career-network)
[PublicServiceCareers.org](https://www.publicservicecareers.org)
[Public Tech Jobs](https://www.publictechjobs.com)

Unfortunately, it's not as easy as showing up on one of those sites, performing a quick search, finding a few jobs for which you might be qualified and submitting a resume. None of those sites are perfect when it comes to narrowing down your opportunities, so we wanted to give you a few tips we've learned based on interviews with experts and our own personal experience.

We also want to be upfront in telling you that this guide is geared largely toward federal opportunities. It's hard to use a broad brush to talk about federal, state and local government opportunities. That being said, we would encourage you to apply many of these same principles for a federal job search to your quest for government work closer to home. After all, we agree with Yulia Vershinina, Associate Director of Career Advancement at Harvard's Kennedy School, who said that state and local government positions likely align with many of your interests:

"Many innovations in policy practices whether it's in education, sustainability or affordable housing take place at the state and local government levels. Unwilling to wait for Washington and eager to make an impact, many high achieving students pursue careers in cities and states. This often allows them to be at the cornerstone of innovative policy making."

If you are considering a career in state and local government, be sure to look at individual government websites. For these positions, while those sites above are fine (especially if you're willing to work in just about any geographic location), you should really go to the source - the city, county or state's website - to get the best information.

Now let's get to the tips for getting a government job. Are you ready? Let's go.

"Many innovations in policy practices whether it's in education, sustainability or affordable housing take place at the state and local government levels. Unwilling to wait for Washington and eager to make an impact, many high achieving students pursue careers in cities and states. This often allows them to be at the cornerstone of innovative policy making."



Yulia Vershinina
Associate Director of Career
Advancement
Harvard Kennedy School

USAJOBS.GOV

If we had to give you some advice in finding the right federal opportunities, it would begin with USAJOBS. And if we had to narrow down your tactical approach there, we'd recommend these two actions:

- Use Advanced Search to Refine Your List of Opportunities
- Create a Saved Search and Set It Up to Receive New Postings

We lay it all out for you below.

USE ADVANCED SEARCH TO REFINE YOUR LIST OF OPPORTUNITIES

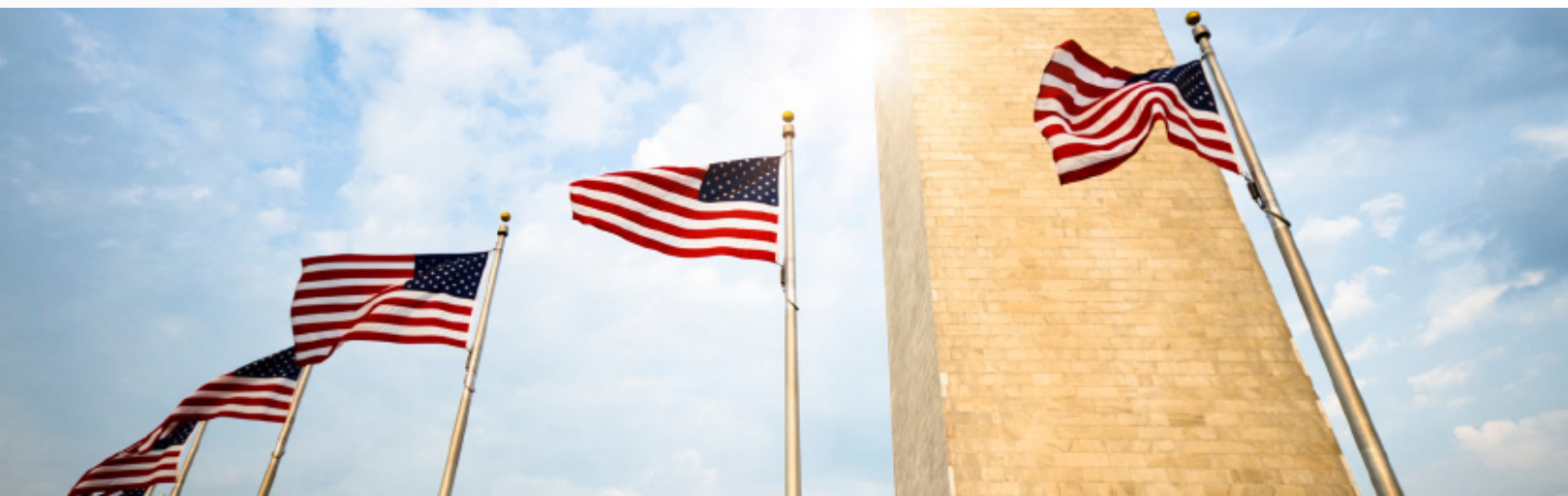
We recommend using the Advanced Search feature for one reason: USAJOBS can be overwhelming. There are thousands of government jobs and it's hard to know which one is right for you. That's why your first stop needs to be the Advanced Search page. Here's how it works:

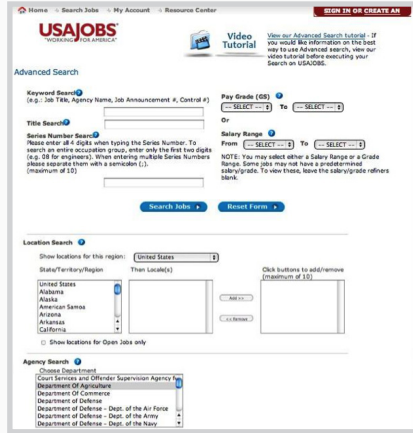
1. Sign in if you have an account or [create a new account](#).

This becomes important later on, so we'd recommend you just go ahead and take care of this part now. If you don't, you will go down this road with us below and might have to redo your work. Take a few minutes and come back. We'll be waiting for you.

2. Go to [USAJOBS.gov](#) and ignore the main search. Click directly on **Advanced Search**.

See the link by the yellow arrow below? Click it.





Fill out this page on USAJobs.com as completely as possible

3. Fill out as many of the parameters as you can.

You might be tempted to fill out the keyword box and hit “Search Jobs.” Resist that urge and take the time to fill out this page as completely as possible. We talk you through each section below.

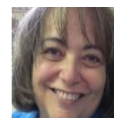
KEYWORDS

Look at your resume. What words jump out at you again and again? Is it budget analysis, project management or human resources? Those are the words you want to enter here. Just pick one phrase at a time so that you can save separate searches (more on that below).

TITLE SEARCH

Do you know a specific title in government that aligns with your skill sets? Maybe it’s management analyst, program analyst or contracting officer. This is the place to put that information. If you’re looking for more information about the most common titles in government, we cover that ground in the “Decipher” section (p. 38).

Of course, before you go ahead and pick a title, you might want to consider what Doris Tirone, Human Resources Specialist at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), told us:



“I don’t recommend that people search on a specific job title unless they are absolutely certain they want to do one kind of work. The reason for that is because there are so many jobs in the federal government with overlapping responsibilities for which individuals possess skill sets that might qualify them for those job titles. If they only search on a job title, they are taking out a lot of job opportunities that they might otherwise qualify for. The same holds true for series. Unless you are absolutely sure, don’t use that as a keyword either. Again, the only thing you will get are the jobs in that series.”

Yulia Vershinina of Harvard’s Kennedy School echoed that sentiment:



“Students seem to shoot for program analyst role, but those positions tend to be the most competitive and hardest to get. When I meet with students, we analyze the skills and see where a particular person fits. Often times “social science analyst” fits really well with students skills set and applying for this type of position may increase your chances of being competitive.”



Donna Dyer,
Director of Career Services
Duke University, Sanford School of
Public Policy

To sum up, if you know what you want, go after it. If not, keep your options open.

SERIES NUMBER

The Occupational Series in government is so complicated it requires [an entire handbook to explain it](#). Let us summarize all 200 pages in this way: you’ve got specific skills and agencies want specific kinds of people. Are you a lawyer? See series 0900. Former accountant or budget geek? Check out 0500. Our hunch is that you’re looking somewhere in the white collar occupational series, which narrows your options to only 23 (out of 50+) groups. Browse that list of groups in the handbook and see if any of them apply to you. Dig a bit deeper and you might be able to pinpoint your very specific niche in government. The key here is to narrow down the opportunities and focus your search. We go over the different occupational series and some common titles on page 15 below.

Michael Schneider, Director of the Washington Public Policy Program at Syracuse University’s Maxwell School, added:



“It’s also wise for the aspirant to understand the level of specificity in each job series code, whether they have the requisite skills, as well as whether they aspire to move higher in that code. It’s also worthwhile to try to get some idea of the scope for promotion and mobility in the job series code. Of course, depending on the individual’s desires and abilities/limits, it’s also good to look for the generalist code that offers the most lateral mobility. These days, one, far more than in the past, moves laterally in order to move up.”

Translation: know where you can find those jobs that are perfectly suited to your background and skills, and you will save yourself a lot of time in the search process.

PAY GRADE OR SALARY RANGE

You might be saying “Show me the money!” and enter a salary range, expecting to get top dollar for your talent. Not so fast. Be sure you have a rudimentary understanding of government salaries. [Skim these salary tables for starters](#). We’d also encourage you to check out our nifty salary calculator:

The 2012 [General Schedule](#) is below - many locations also have an additional [locality payment](#) to reflect higher cost of living (for example DC

“Pick your job series wisely. Here’s the number of job openings in a sample week based on an extract of white collar opportunities on USAJOBS:

- 212** Information Technology
- 202** Generalist
- 130** Human Resources
- 117** Acquisition
- 73** Program Management
- 51** Budget
- 16** Auditing
- 14** Comm / Public Affairs

If your career is focused on being an auditor or communications professionals, there are just not that many openings and you need to be aware of it. There are literally 10 times more IT jobs.”

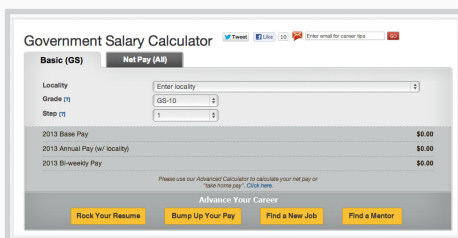


Steve Ressler,
Founder, GovLoop.com

For more information, see Steve’s full post entitled, [“3 Tips on Planning Your Federal Career”](#).

metro area has locality payment of an extra 24.27% on top of wages). Below is the basic chart:

Grade	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5	Step 6	Step 7	Step 8	Step 9	Step 10	WITHIN GRADE AMOUNTS
1	\$ 17,803	\$ 18,398	\$ 18,990	\$ 19,579	\$ 20,171	\$ 20,519	\$ 21,104	\$ 21,694	\$ 21,717	\$ 22,269	VARIES
2	20,017	20,493	21,155	21,717	21,961	22,607	23,253	23,899	24,545	25,191	VARIES
3	21,840	22,568	23,296	24,024	24,752	25,480	26,208	26,936	27,664	28,392	728
4	24,518	25,335	26,152	26,969	27,786	28,603	29,420	30,237	31,054	31,871	817
5	27,431	28,345	29,259	30,173	31,087	32,001	32,915	33,829	34,743	35,657	914
6	30,577	31,596	32,615	33,634	34,653	35,672	36,691	37,710	38,729	39,748	1019
7	33,979	35,112	36,245	37,378	38,511	39,644	40,777	41,910	43,043	44,176	1133
8	37,631	38,885	40,139	41,393	42,647	43,901	45,155	46,409	47,663	48,917	1254
9	41,563	42,948	44,333	45,718	47,103	48,488	49,873	51,258	52,643	54,028	1385
10	45,771	47,297	48,823	50,349	51,875	53,401	54,927	56,453	57,979	59,505	1526
11	50,287	51,963	53,639	55,315	56,991	58,667	60,343	62,019	63,695	65,371	1676
12	60,274	62,283	64,292	66,301	68,310	70,319	72,328	74,337	76,346	78,355	2009
13	71,674	74,063	76,452	78,841	81,230	83,619	86,008	88,397	90,786	93,175	2389
14	84,697	87,520	90,343	93,166	95,989	98,812	101,635	104,458	107,281	110,104	2823
15	99,628	102,949	106,270	109,591	112,912	116,233	119,554	122,875	126,196	129,517	3321



Find out additional details about your take home pay and other valuable information with the [GovLoop Government Salary Calculator](#)

Most agencies are covered by the General Schedule above, but there are a few outliers. There are special pay systems for a few specialized job fields, such as law enforcement, judges, and doctors. Furthermore, a few agencies have their own pay schedule - the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) uses a special pay band system, while financial agencies such as Securities Exchange Commission (SEC), Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB), Federal Housing Finance Administration (FHFA), and Office of the Comptroller of the Currency (OCC) each set their own pay system, which are usually approximately 25% more than similar non-financial agencies.

LOCATION SEARCH

This one is pretty straightforward, right? Well, there are even a few pearls of wisdom we can offer on where you work. If you want to work in a specific spot, [start with a search](#) on federal jobs by state. It's no surprise that the DC metro area (DC, Maryland, Virginia) is #1 with large population states like California and Texas coming in at #2 and #3, but the vast majority of government jobs aren't in Washington - that's just where a lot of them happen to be clustered.

Also, be sure you understand the region around a city where you want to work. Some agencies are not in Washington, DC, but are located on the outskirts in cities like Bethesda or Fort Meade, Maryland, or Arling-

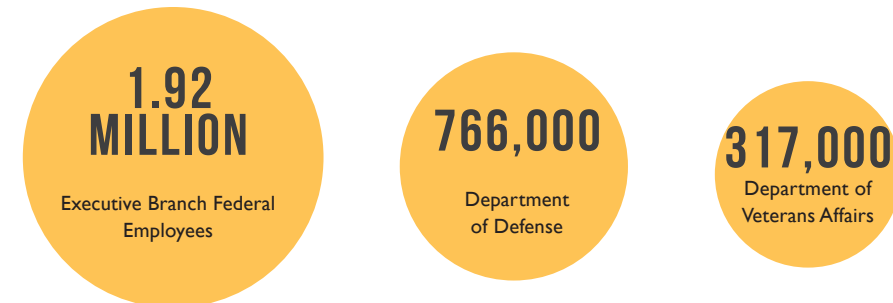
ton and Alexandria, Virginia. It might be worth checking an online map to be sure you aren't unnecessarily limiting yourself by excluding a city on the outskirts of your target location. In addition, most job search sites like USAJOBS.gov let you choose a distance radius to search, so be sure to use that tool.

One quick caveat: Do a reality check for somewhere that you've never lived before. Ask someone who lives in a particular locality about the commuting options and the relative time of each mode of transit. Sometimes 20 miles can take an hour in a car and 40 miles might be just 30 minutes on a train.

AGENCY SEARCH

If we had a dollar for every student fresh out of college that wanted to work at the State Department or USAID, we'd be extraordinarily wealthy. The fact is that there are so many other agencies and sub-agencies that have appealing missions that it might behoove you to skip this box.

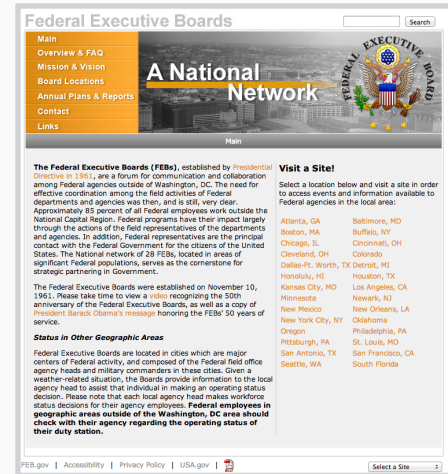
It might seem simple, but the largest agencies have the most opportunities. Consider, for example, that in December 2011, [OPM shows](#) that there were:



That means more than 50% of employees (and more important for you - job vacancies) are DoD or VA!

Of course, if you have a strong desire to work for a particular agency, go for it. Just remember that there may be even fewer openings in those agencies. Do you really want to work for the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy? With only 35 full-time staff in total, you are not likely to see many opportunities there. A good place to start for understanding the relative size of each agency is [OPM's list of federal employees by agency](#).

Do you feel like you have no idea what agency might work best for you? Joel McFarland, a former Federal Career Internship Program participant,



The U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) runs Federal Executive Boards (FEB) - a forum for senior leaders - in the largest cities with a federal presence. The list of FEBs is a great cheat-sheet for cities where there are often large agencies like CDC in Atlanta or USDA in Kansas City with big field offices or regional headquarters.



If you'd like a bit more information on using the Advanced Search, USAJOBS has a [snazzy tutorial video](#) that should help (upper right of the Advanced Search page).

says what helped him was to “search around the agency’s website to understand the work they do and how they turn that into a job description.” Here’s a [good list of all agencies](#).

With all that being said, this is the part of the search process where we’d recommend that you keep your options a bit more wide open - at least at first. Get your foot in the door, then make your moves once you’re in the system. Take it from Bryan Kempton, Director, Office of Career Services and Alumni Relations, University of Maryland School of Public Policy, who advises students on how to navigate the hiring process:



“Be creative and flexible with your federal job hunting! Many students are only interested in finding internships and full-time employment opportunities within the most well-known or obvious federal agencies or departments. The most successful students, however, realize that many federal opportunities exist in lesser-known or even unlikely agencies and departments. One of the best resources for navigating the entirety of the federal government is the Washington Information Directory, available in print or online. Check with your career services office or university library to see if they have or will purchase a subscription.”

OCCUPATIONAL SERIES

We covered this under “Series” above. The good news is that Advanced Search makes it easy for you to truncate down once you know where you fit.

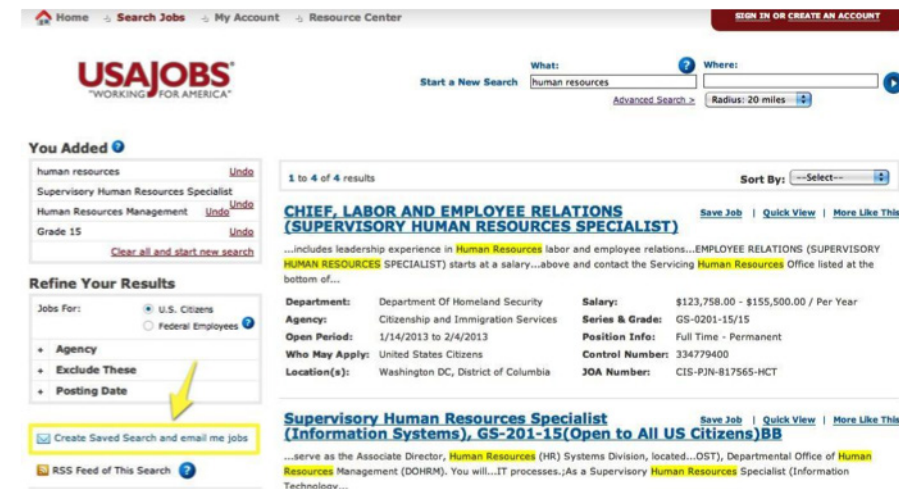
EXCLUDE POSTINGS FOR JOBS OPEN LONGER THAN 30 DAYS

Don’t hit “yes” here. In fact, we wish OPM had an option to “Exclude Postings for Jobs Open Less Than 30 Days!” Just leave this at no. Most of the jobs where you even have a chance are open for longer periods. Sometimes you’ll see a job opening with a one year opening period - kind of confusing, eh? Don’t worry. Go ahead and apply. This is often called an open, continuous job announcement and throughout the year an agency may interview from this candidate list.

There are a few other boxes to check here and there that are self explanatory, but the quick overview we just shared should get you oriented enough to achieve your number one goal: getting a government job.

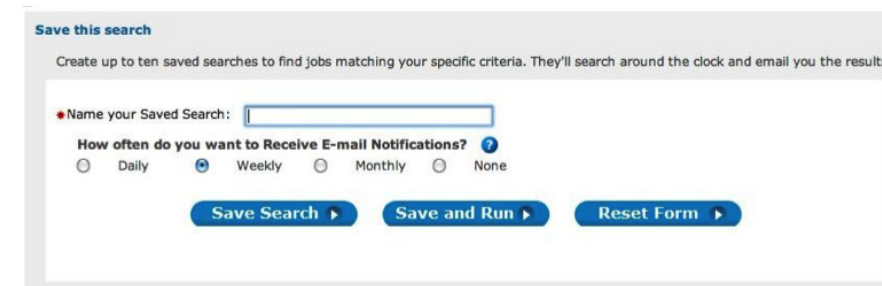
CREATE A SAVED SEARCH AND SET IT UP TO SEND NEW POSTINGS

While you can try to make your resume match a position (and you should - see below), the best thing you can do to save yourself time is to filter out the opportunities that aren’t the right fit, then put your search on cruise control. Once you’ve created an account on USAJOBS and played around with some of the search options, consider setting up one or more saved searches. It’s a bit hidden, but on the left sidebar of the search results page, you will find the saved search link. We’ve highlighted it for you below:



Oddly, when you click on it, you’ll be brought back to a modified advanced search page and lose your original search, so you’ll have to enter your parameters again (sorry – system glitch).

Now here’s the most important part: one size does not fit all and we would recommend that you set up a few filtered searches on a variety of parameters. For instance, you might want to set up separate searches based on keywords, title, series and location. Then you’ll come to the bottom of the page and see this:



Give it a clever name like “My Perfect Public Affairs Job” and pick a frequency for the new opportunities that will conveniently start to arrive in your email. Depending on how quickly you want to break into government, you can adjust how often you get updates. Federal careers expert Camille Roberts advises if you are conducting an aggressive job search, to set it for ‘Daily’, especially to begin with so you can get a sense of what is available. Also, some jobs close within five days so you would miss those opportunities if you set it to ‘Weekly’. She also talked about a potential Saved Search approach:



“If you are new to USAJOBS and to get a good feel for job titles in government, set up one Saved Search just on a few criteria, i.e., location and pay, or GS level. Let it run for a week and see what comes into your inbox. This has helped my clients find jobs they never would have thought to apply for because they were using too many criteria, focused on job titles, or basing their search on salary alone.”

If you need to, set up a new email just for the purpose of USAJOBS so you can have everything related to your job search come to that email. Do not use something like 4-WheelingBadBoy@gmail.com. Be sure to use your name in the email such as CamilleRoberts@gmail.com. This helps the recruiter match your email to your career communications (marketing documents) and helps with your brand.

After you see what is available for a week or two, refine your search a bit more based on another criteria. Study Saved Searches. Use it strategically and it will save you hours and hours of pouring over job announcements that are not a good fit. You might just find that great job you have been looking for. Also, I have found that less is more. Don’t put 20-30 keywords in a string. After setting up the first Saved Search mentioned above and getting familiar with job announcements, set up 5 Saved Searches and spread out the keywords among them.”

So there you have it. Save and send searches to yourself. Review them regularly. Be patient. The right job is on its way to your inbox.

NOT ALL FEDERAL JOBS ARE ON USAJOBS!

You may think that all agencies will put their positions on USAJOBS.gov, but that is not true. Numerous agencies have positions that are considered “Excepted Service” and set their own qualification requirements that are not subject to the standard appointment, pay, and classification rules as other positions.

But wait, you might be saying, what does “Excepted Service” mean? We like how the folks at MakingaDifference.org explain “Excepted Service”:

- There are two main ways to enter the federal civil service — through an excepted service appointment or through a competitive process. Regardless of whether you are applying for an excepted or competitive position, what is important to recognize is that it is typical for hundreds and even thousands of individuals to apply to any one position, so take care in reading the details of the application and make sure you are addressing everything that is asked for.
- Excepted service is a special authority used by the federal government, which allows agencies to use a streamlined hiring process rather than hiring through the traditional competitive process. This authority allows agencies to help meet an unusual or special hiring need. Agencies can use this authority to individuals with backgrounds in highly needed or hard to recruit areas of government, like attorneys, chaplains, medical doctors, etc., because for these types of jobs it is often impractical to use standard qualification requirements in order to rate applicants using a traditional competitive process.

Examples of agencies where “Excepted Service” might apply include: CIA, FBI, U.S. court systems, security jobs, and legislative/policy positions. A full list of these agencies with links to the respective job websites can be found [here](#). You can also learn more in [this GovLoop Discussion](#).



JOBS.GOVLOOP.COM

Now let's say you click on one of those job opportunities. What you get on the next page is something we're pretty proud of since you can't find it anywhere. The job results are:

- integrated with **LinkedIn** to show you who you know at the agency where the job is located
- tied to **Glassdoor** user reviews of the agencies and jobs
- separated according to key job information under tabs for ease of viewing (vs. scrolling down the long USAJOBS page)
- linked to other **related job openings** so that you can keep moving ahead in your quest for the perfect position.

Finally, like USAJOBS, we send out a weekly email for each of those job categories mentioned above where we pick the top 10 most interesting jobs each week. Feel free to sign up and let us do the searching for you.

In fact, taking a slice of 1,260 white collar jobs in Jobs.GovLoop.com, GovLoop Founder Steve Ressler penned a blog post titled "[4 Stats About Federal Job Openings](#)" that pulls back the curtain on USAJOBS listings. Here's an excerpt:

60% of openings are for current feds - If you are already a fed, make sure you are applying for these openings. (If not, don't be discouraged - this guide's your secret key to unlock the door)

17% are open less than 10 days - For these jobs you have to be quick to find out about them to apply. Some argue most of these jobs have internal candidates, but other career advisors and HR officials have told me that just as often these are real openings with quick turn-arounds.

61% of openings are mid- to senior-level (GS 12-15) - Translation: there are a lot fewer entry and lower level grade openings.

21% have multiple vacancies - I always encourage

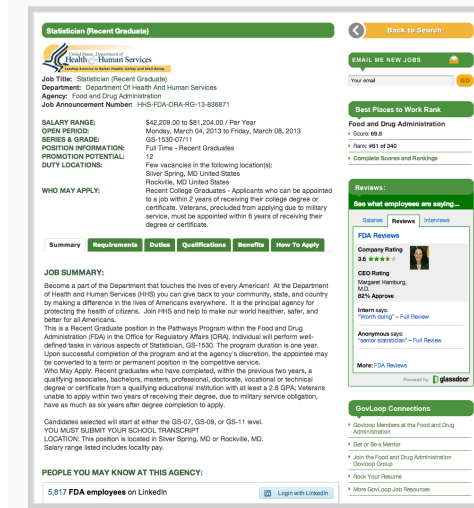
Recognizing the importance of filtering out the opportunities that aren't right for you, GovLoop built a special website called [Jobs.GovLoop.com](#). We've built it on top of [USAJOBS.data](#), which we mashed up with [LinkedIn](#), [GlassDoor](#), [BestPlacestoWork](#) and GovLoop information, then basically tried to provide a new approach to searching for federal jobs (just like [Kayak](#) and [Hipmunk](#) provide new ways to search for flights).

In fact, let us walk you through the site:

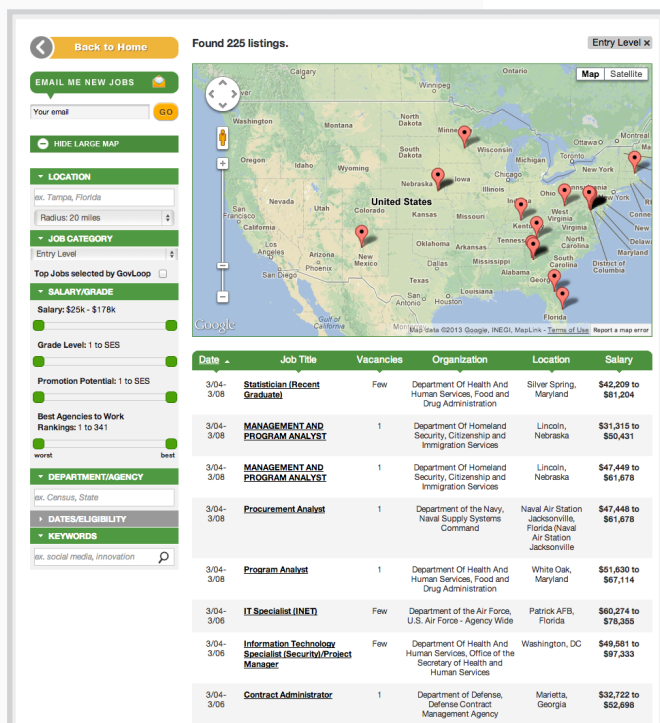
First, when you land on the homepage, you'll see that we've picked several of the main job categories, from acquisition to auditing to human resources to program management and information technology. We've also included a couple of the more common titles like Budget Analyst and Program Analyst as well as a categories for entry level and \$100K+ (we know you want to swing for the big fence right from the start).

Basically, you can click on these categories and be taken immediately to a page where we've immediately truncated the results for you. On that next page, you can:

- 1) Filter by **grade AND promotion potential** (find that GS-11 job that goes to a 13).
- 2) Search by **location** - both visually with maps and by keywords.
- 3) Filter by [Best Places to Work Data](#) for best agencies (skip agencies that rank poorly).
- 4) Filter by **how many days the job is open** (but don't be scared away by short windows).
- 5) Select jobs by whether they have **multiple vacancies** (pro tip: you just upped your chances) and **salary**.
- 6) Filter by if the job is for all **U.S. Citizens or Status Candidates** (current federal employees).



On every job page, you'll find information pulled in from LinkedIn, Glassdoor, Best Places to Work, as well as GovLoop.



folks to especially look at these job openings as these are agencies motivated to quickly hire and your odds are increased

We talk more about multiple vacancies and some of the other nuances around federal job descriptions below, but suffice it to say that the competition is fierce...but you can compete.

BEST PLACES TO WORK TIP

If you're new to the Best Places to Work in the Federal Government® rankings, we wanted to tell you a little more about them. Even if your heart is set on working in a particular agency, you might be open to others based on what you learn about another agency if it's considered one of the best in government.

Best Places data comes from the survey responses of nearly 700,000 civil servants to produce a detailed view of employee satisfaction and commitment across 362 federal agencies and subcomponents. The Partnership for Public Service uses data from the Office of Personnel Management's [Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey](#) to rank agencies and their subcomponents according to a Best Places to Work index score. Agencies and subcomponents are measured on overall employee satisfaction and scored in 10 workplace categories, including:

- effective leadership,
- employee skills/mission match,
- pay,
- teamwork, and
- work/life balance.

The Best Places to Work rankings allow you to make side-by-side comparisons of how agencies or their subcomponents ranked in various categories to see how they compare to other agencies and whether they have improved or declined over time.

Most relevant for many of you reading this guide are the "Under 40" rankings that you can find here:

<http://www.bestplacestowork.org/BPTW/rankings/demographics/sub/underforty>

Basically, those agencies received the top scores from people under 40 years old - that's good to know if you want an organization that is friendly to rising stars like you.

The Best Places to Work
IN THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT® 2012 RANKINGS

INTERNATIONAL JOBS:

The World is Bigger Than You Think

Most new graduates want to work in an agency that has a global scope and impact. The default agencies for these job seekers always seem to be State Department and USAID. What you may not know is that there are at least 45 other agencies or subcomponents with an international facet.

Browse the agencies below and learn a bit more about each of them. In fact, some of these agencies might give you a better chance of getting into government as there are likely fewer applicants for open opportunities. Moreover, a more specific agency would allow you to fill a unique niche.

Do you have an interest in saving the planet? Check out the Environmental Protection Agency's International Cooperation.

Are you a fan of flying and feel good about keeping our skies safe? The US Department of Transportation has an Aviation and International Affairs component.

- [Agency for International Development](#)
- [Air Force](#)
- [Army](#)
- [Aviation and International Affairs, U.S. Department of Transportation](#)
- [Bureau of Industry and Security, U.S. Department of Commerce](#)
- [Bureau of International Labor Affairs, U.S. Department of Labor](#)
- [Central Intelligence Agency](#)
- [Citizenship and Immigration Services Bureau \(formerly Immigration and Naturalization Service\)](#)
- [Coast Guard](#)
- [Commission on International Religious Freedom](#)
- [Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe](#)
- [Cuba Broadcasting/Radio and TV Marti](#)
- [Defense Department \(DOD\)](#)
- [Environmental Protection Agency, International Cooperation](#)
- [Foreign Agricultural Service](#)
- [Global Affairs, State Department](#)
- [Homeland Security Department](#)
- [Import-Export Bank](#)
- [International Affairs, Department of Treasury](#)
- [International Affairs Office, Department of Interior](#)
- [International Broadcasting Bureau](#)
- [International Education, Department of Education](#)
- [International Intellectual Property, U.S. Patent and Trademark Office](#)
- [International Trade Administration](#)
- [Japan-U.S. Friendship Commission](#)
- [Joint Chiefs of Staff](#)
- [Marine Corps](#)
- [Millennium Challenge Corporation](#)
- [National Guard](#)
- [Navy](#)
- [Office of National Drug Control Policy](#)
- [Organization of the Department of Defense](#)
- [Overseas Private Investment Corporation](#)
- [Peace Corps](#)
- [Political Affairs, U.S. Department of State](#)
- [Public Diplomacy, U.S. Department of State](#)
- [Radio Free Asia](#)
- [Radio Free Europe](#)
- [State Department](#)
- [U.S. – China Economic and Security Review Commission](#)
- [U.S. Court of International Trade](#)
- [U.S. Customs and Border Protection](#)
- [U.S. Trade Representative](#)
- [Unified Combatant Commands](#)
- [Veterans Affairs](#)
- [Voice of America](#)
- [White House](#)

USAJOBS TIP

Since working in an agency with a global scope is so popular, we did want to give you a few quick pointers on using USAJOBS to search for international opportunities:

- ▶ Go to USAJOBS and click on “Advanced Search” as we suggest above.
- ▶ Try using “international” or “foreign” as your keywords.
- ▶ If you know the country where you’d want to work, use the location search to narrow your options by region, then by country – and you can even select a specific city, if you’d like.
- ▶ You might find that some of these jobs have “Multiple Locations”
 - Contact the agency to learn more about how the opportunity might differ in the various locations.
 - Even if one of those locations is in the US, go ahead and apply anyway.
 - Be flexible and consider a different country than the one you originally had in mind; perhaps it could lead to a transfer down the road.

Another option is to filter out International Relations and International Cooperation jobs by checking the box or searching on occupational series 0131 and 0136...though we did find this option might filter a bit too much.

Given the number of agencies listed there, we’re certain that you might just discover other international opportunities that fit your passions and skills.

Interested in the foreign service? Obviously, the State Department runs the largest foreign service program, but did you know there is also a [Foreign Agricultural Service](#), a [Commercial Foreign Service](#), and even a [USAID Foreign Service](#)?

That should get you started (and you’ll find that there are a decent number of opportunities out there), but let’s say you try pretty hard and can’t seem to land that international opportunity. If you’re really set on a government gig that takes you around the globe, but can’t seem to find a way in after several attempts, you might want to get foreign experience on your resume in other ways. From teaching in Department of Defense Education Activity (DODEA) schools to volunteering in non-profits or NGOs or even serving at a military exchange, the resources below help you think about a couple other viable avenues to get some international experience:

- http://www.federaljobs.net/overseas.htm#Exchange_Service
- <http://www.makingthedifference.org/federalcareers/international-relations.shtml>
- <http://www.state.gov/m/fsiltc/79765.htm>
- <https://help.usajobs.gov/index.php/Teachers>
- <https://help.usajobs.gov/index.php/Linguists>
- <http://www.umass.edu/careers/images/Work%20Abroad%20with%20the%20US%20Government.pdf>

INTELLIGENCE JOBS:

Sneak Into Government

Have you ever wondered how you can get a job in the intelligence community? It’s not a secret (oh, c’mon - you have to laugh at that one). The U.S. intelligence community is now comprised of 17 agencies all working independently and collaboratively to gather the necessary intelligence necessary to conduct foreign relations and national security activities.

What’s unique about the intelligence community is that they actively recruit people from all backgrounds. They need diverse skill sets from recent graduates, former military members, and professionals in career transition. Yulia Vershinina of Harvard University says that:



“Intelligence series aren’t necessarily easier to get, but since many intelligence roles require more unique and specific skills sets, your chances are higher of getting a position if you meet those requirements. I’ve seen many times that once someone applies and passes the qualification stage, they will get an interview.”

Truth be told, getting a job in the intelligence community is an arduous task that can take over a year to complete. You must submit an application and after you’re selected as a candidate go through the security clearance process. Only after you’ve completed the security clearance process can you be officially hired. Realizing this can save you some headaches in the future, apply early so that your job hunting isn’t diminished due to the long security clearance process.

To apply, you can search on USAJOBS.gov. Start by using “intelligence” as a search term then narrow your search by searching for specific agencies you’re interested in. You can filter out Intelligence jobs by checking the box or searching on occupational series 0132 and 0134. Since several Excepted Service Intelligence Community agencies don’t post on USAJOBS, you might also contact a recruiter directly from the intelligence agency you’re interested in using the information provided on their respective websites. Below are

THE U.S. INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY

[Air Force Intelligence](#)

[Army Intelligence](#)

[Central Intelligence Agency](#)

[Coast Guard Intelligence](#)

[Defense Intelligence Agency](#)

[Department of Energy](#)

[Department of Homeland Security](#)

[Department of State](#)

[Department of the Treasury](#)

[Drug Enforcement Administration](#)

[Federal Bureau of Investigation](#)

[Marine Corps Intelligence](#)

[National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency](#)

[National Reconnaissance Office](#)

[National Security Agency](#)

[Navy Intelligence](#)

[Office of the Director of National Intelligence](#)

WHERE CAN I LEARN ABOUT THE DIFFERENT FEDERAL AGENCIES?

Look no further than:

<http://www.usa.gov/directory/federal/index.shtml>.

You can find links to every single agency and sub-agency component there.

some websites and resources that make the process flow faster and give you access to more information:

- Intelligence.gov represents the 17 different agencies listed above and give information about the application process.
- [Intelligence Virtual Career Fair](http://IntelligenceVirtualCareerFair) is a free online career fair every February that allows you to learn about available intelligence jobs, interact with recruiters, and learn how to apply for positions. See www.ICVirtualFair.com for more details.

Oh, and one other quick word on security clearance jobs: you might be wondering if they pay more. Here's a snippet taken from the [2012 Clearance Jobs Security Clearance Compensation Survey](#):



Earnings for professionals with an active federal security clearance increased over two percent since the 2011 ClearanceJobs Compensation Report, with an average total compensation of \$90,865. The average base pay for cleared workers is \$76,152, with additional compensation in the form of overtime, danger pay and bonuses contributing another 19%, or \$14,713.

Not bad, eh? If you're a big [24](#) or [Bourne Identity](#) fan, this might be the best place for you to get started in government.

SPECIAL HIRING PROGRAMS

Are you special? Of course you are. In speaking with Donna Dyer, a career advisor at the Sanford School of Public Policy at Duke University, "special hiring programs are the best way for new graduates to get a government job." There are several opportunities for you to consider, but your starting point should be the [Pathways Program](#). One agency program analyst said that, "Pathways allows for an individual who has little to no federal career experience get into the door. Once you have crossed through that federal career steel door, it is easier to move around."

Furthermore, government careers expert Camille Roberts of CC Career Services said,



"Pathways is an exciting program. It can really help the intern solidify their decision to work in public service as well as provide a paid educational opportunity to work in their chosen field side by side with people performing the work they are interested in. It gives them hands-on experience that could not be easily gained otherwise. Some interns who complete the program may be eligible to convert to a permanent federal job."

There are 3 programs under Pathways: the President Management Fellows Program, Internships and Recent Graduates. We highlight each below:

PRESIDENTIAL MANAGEMENT FELLOWS PROGRAM

For more than three decades, the PMF Program has been the Federal government's premier leadership development program for advanced degree candidates. This program is now for individuals who have received a qualifying advanced degree within the preceding two years.

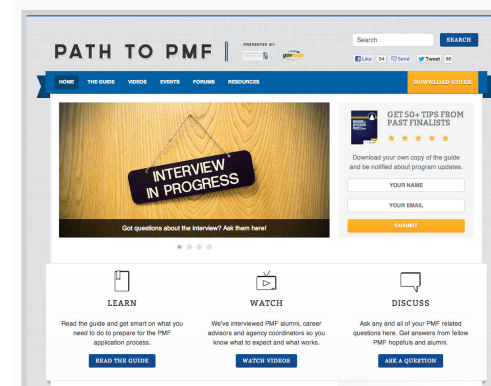
Since this is such an important program, GovLoop and the Robertson Foundation created a "Guide to the Presidential Management Fellows (PMF) Program" at PathtoPMF.com that was designed to help prospective candidates navigate the process. In that guide, we explain PMF in this way:

The PMF program is a great way to start your career as a public servant in the Federal government. First, you should know that it's a two-year commitment. PMF participants are paid a full salary

SO WHAT IS PATHWAYS?

Here's a quick excerpt from the official website:

The Pathways Programs offer clear paths to Federal internships for students from high school through post-graduate school and to careers for recent graduates, and provide meaningful training and career development opportunities for individuals who are at the beginning of their Federal service.



PathtoPMF.com is your one-stop resource to tips and information on the PMF and Pathways Programs. Discuss the process with peers and experts.

Year	Applicants	Finalists	Appointments
2007	3,725	792	443
2008	3,628	754	439
2009	5,111	786	494
2010	8,700	869	599
2011	9,102	850	470

(as of 2/14/12)

PMF SELECTIONS 2007-2011

and benefits at the GS-9, GS-11 or GS-12 (roughly \$40-60,000 a year) levels depending on your appointment. In some situations, participants may even be promoted to as high as GS-13 (up to \$70,000/year). Depending on the agency where a PMF participant is working, they may be eligible for the Federal Student Loan Repayment Program.

One current federal intern suggests, “recent graduates from Master’s and Ph.D. programs should apply for the Professional Management Fellows Program. Although it is extremely competitive, you have several opportunities to apply. If you are not chosen, you can use that time between applications to develop yourself through volunteering or other membership functions and come back stronger for the next opportunity.”

Moreover, in order to appreciate just how competitive, “it’s important to remember to look at the number of applicants versus finalists,” said Kaleigh Emerson, PMF Class of 2010, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.”

Good idea. Let’s look at those numbers. Below are some statistics from the Class of 2012:



We also know that the number of applicants for the Class of 2013 was 12,120 with 1,654 (13.6%) being named semi-finalists. At the same time, the number of available positions does not seem to be getting much larger, making it even more competitive. Note the trend for the previous five years in the table to the right.

Although it’s a pretty exclusive program, the good news is that once you get into government via PMF, you have a solid shot at advancing faster than your peers. The federal service retention rate for PMFs is 83-88% after three years, and 63-77% after five years.

One quick note: if you are selected as a PMF finalist, you are not guaranteed a job; you will only be eligible for a PMF appointment by a Federal Agency. Although you may not receive an appointment immediately, you have one year to receive an appointment and can still apply to Federal positions outside of the PMF program on USAJOBS.

Michael Schneider at The Maxwell School of Syracuse University and Career Development Advisory for RFFG underscored this advice:



“The finalist must market her/himself with prospective agencies. Check out the list of PMF openings well before the Fair, make contacts, follow up by showing up early at the relevant table, and follow that up with personal contact (“thanks for information or interview”, etc.). Use the PMF process also to informally find about other openings, actual or prospective.”

If you make it to the Finalist level and successfully land a placement with an agency, the requirements for completion will include:

- minimum of 160 hours of formal classroom training (80/year)
- complete at least one developmental assignment four to six months in length
- create a performance plan and undergo an annual performance review
- create an individual development plan (IDP) used to set goals for your time in the program
- Receive Executive Resource Board (ERB; or equivalent) certification that you have met all program requirements prior to conversion

To learn more about the PMF Program, we’d encourage you to visit the resources we put together at PathtoPMF.com. In addition to the guide that we produced, you can ask questions in our discussion forum or watch video interviews with current and former PMFs, career advisors and agency PMF coordinators. Of course, the official information can be found at PMF.gov.

INTERNSHIP PROGRAMS

The new Pathways Internship Program replaces the former Student Career Experience Program (SCEP) and Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP). The Internship programs are designed for students from high school to graduate school to provide an opportunity to work in agencies and explore Federal careers while still in school. If you’re looking for a way to get your feet wet in a Federal agency and still be a student, this is the program for you!

PMF APPLICATION PROCESS

Prospective candidates complete a rigorous application process that includes:

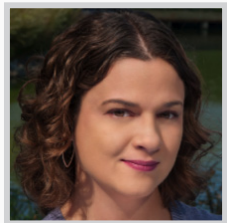
APPLICATION AND RESUME

ONLINE ASSESSMENT

IN-PERSON ASSESSMENT

JOB FAIR

Right after I got accepted into my graduate program, I signed up for the school's jobs/internships listserv. Not more than a week later, the Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) posted an internship on the listserv. I responded immediately and got the position. Although the internship was unpaid, I made many connections during my time on the job. One of them actually emailed me to let me know that he was leaving his post, and thought I would be the perfect person to take his place. So, I applied to fill his shoes as a SCEP (now the Pathways program), was accepted and now here I am!"



Dorothy Amatucci,
Intern, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
and former GovLoop Fellow

What's great about the Internship program is that the positions are paid, can be part-time or full time, and completion of the program also makes a person eligible for conversion to a permanent job in the civil service! The position lengths range from temporary, summer only, or one year or longer depending on the specific agency. The positions that you would be selected for also benefit you academically: they are related to your field of study and academic career goals.

Chris Grant, a former internship participant said that he also "reached out to contacts I made during my internship" when looking for a full time job.

As with most Federal positions, there are some eligibility requirements. For this program, the requirements are simple: you are a current student in an eligible institution, which include:

- high school, college (4 year colleges/universities, community colleges, and junior colleges);
- professional, technical, vocational, and trade school;
- advanced degree programs or other qualifying educational institutions where a student is pursuing a qualifying degree or certificate

So what happens after you successfully complete an internship? Your position can be converted to a permanent position (full time job!) within 120 days after your internship ends if you do a few things right. Here are the key things to have in mind if you have your heart set on a full time position:

- Must complete at least 640 hours of work experience acquired through the internship program
- Complete your degree or certificate program
- Perform your internship job successfully
- Meet the qualification standards for the full time position that you'd be converted to

If you perform exceptionally well during your internship, agencies have the discretion to waive up to 320 of the required 640 required hours for people who demonstrate high potential and outstanding academic achievement.

How do you apply? If you've read this far into the guide you should be very familiar with the USAJOBS.gov website. Do an advanced search for jobs with "intern" listed in the title. Each position will have different application requirements and processes so pay particular attention to what's listed under the "Eligibility" and "How to Apply" tabs. You can also go directly to:

<https://www.usajobs.gov/JobSearch/Search/GetResults?Student=Yes>

We can't stress enough that this may be your best shot at getting into government with less experience than other candidates. Toni Harris, the Director of Career Services at NYU's Wagner School, mentions that many times internships can help you land a full time position in a different way:



"Be open to internships in all sectors - public, private or nonprofit. Just make sure that they provide the professional experience and networking opportunities that you will need to compete for the government roles you plan to pursue after graduation. What are your target hiring managers seeking in ideal candidates? Are you missing any of those skills or attributes? Find internships that will help you fill the gaps."

RECENT GRADUATES

For all of the recent graduates out there, there is a program designed specifically for you! If you have recently graduated (within the past 2 years; veterans potentially have longer) from qualifying educational institutions, these programs give you a way into Federal agencies and also provide career development, training, and mentorship.

The recent graduate positions last for one year and you are eligible if you meet these requirements:

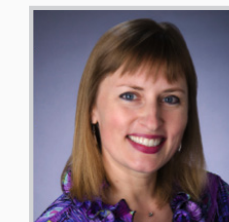
- completed your degree (associates, bachelors, masters, professional, doctoral, vocational or technical degree or certificate) in the previous 2 years
- have been a veteran within the last six years and cannot meet the 2 year requirement due to military service obligations

What do these Recent Grad programs offer? Well, if you are selected for a position you will receive orientation into the agency, mentorship by an employee of the agency throughout the program, an individual development plan to create and track your

While Pathways Internships are paid and are possible direct feeders to full-time jobs, note that there are also plenty of unpaid internships offered by agencies outside the auspices of the Pathways Program. Some of these are posted to USAJOBS as "volunteer programs", like State Department's unpaid internships, but most often listed under the career section of agency websites. Many agencies offer both paid and unpaid internships, so you may wish to look beyond USAJOBS for these opportunities.

As Tamara Golden, Career Consultant from the University of California San Diego's School of International Relations and Pacific Studies adds:

"Unpaid internships can still be a viable foot in the door with an agency or provide valuable connections and pathways to future opportunities, especially those that add important skills or experience to your resume or provide you with a security clearance."



career planning, professional development and training, as well as at least 40 hours of formal, interactive training each year of the program. Receiving this type of individual training and mentoring is invaluable to your long-term career goals!

Here's what a current Pathways intern has to say about the flexibility that the recent graduate program provides:

"[Pathways] gives more freedom for the graduate to try out different positions. For instance, I am in the Pathways program and I work for the VA. Because I am Pathways, I can do work in Communications some days and toggle between quality workforce development and communications. This is beneficial to me because it gives me the opportunity to try out different job positions to see where I fit best, all while I have consistent, fixed position in QWD."

Former intern Dorothy Amatucci had a similar assessment of her experience:



"Pathways has been great for me because the program is so flexible. Working part time helps me build my resume, but gives me enough time to also focus on school work. It also lets you see and understand what it's like to really work in government: you are more than just a "summer intern". I have been with USFWS for almost a full year now, and this has given me the time to focus on long-term projects that, in my opinion, are more indicative of what "real" government work is like. I don't want to knock summer internships, but I don't think three months is really enough time to get to know how large organizations, like government, really work."

Just like the internship programs, you have the possibility of having your position converted to a permanent job. To be eligible for full time conversion you must have completed one year of continuous service at the agency, demonstrate successful job performance, and meet the qualifications of the full time position.

How do you apply to the recent graduates positions? Just like the others (noticing a trend?), do an advanced search on USAJOBS.gov for "Recent Graduate" and you'll be shown a large list. Be aware of the different deadlines for applications and qualifications as they vary from position to position.

FELLOWSHIP PROGRAMS

Fellowships are unique in that they provide an individual the opportunity to serve in an ideal setting for advanced subspecialty training. If you are chosen for a fellowship you are given the opportunity to study and gain invaluable insight into a particular field of study. The fellowship programs can last anywhere from 6 weeks to several years.

portunity to study and gain invaluable insight into a particular field of study. The fellowship programs can last anywhere from 6 weeks to several years.

Fellows programs aren't just designed for high achieving recent graduates, they're also for high achieving faculty and staff (who were once probably high achieving recent grads) who want to further their background! We'll list some of the most interesting fellows programs below:

Department of Homeland Security "Secretary's Honors Program"

The Secretary's Honors Program (SHP) is a highly competitive, premier program for exceptional recent graduates looking for a career at DHS. Qualified candidates apply for a limited number of slots and are selected based on their academic performance, experience and other criteria. Those selected for the program will be offered a variety of incentives and enhanced career opportunities including Department rotations, mentorships, focused on-the-job training and inclusion in various professional development programs.

ICMA Local Government Career Fellowship

This highly competitive career-development opportunity is designed to generate interest in local government careers among recent master's program graduates. Selected Fellows are placed in a full-time management-track local government positions, shaped by direct mentorship under senior government leaders and rotational assignments.

National Defense Science and Engineering Graduate Fellowships:

The program seeks to identify individuals who desire to pursue careers in science and engineering fields of study. Selected fellows are allowed to pursue their graduate studies at whichever university they choose to attend. The goal is to provide the United States with talented, doctorally trained American men and women who will lead state-of-the-art research projects in disciplines having the greatest payoff to national security requirements.

Pamela Harriman Foreign Service Fellowships:

This program inspires the best of a new generation to pursue careers in public service. The fellowships are offered annually to three outstanding undergraduates from across the nation. Each student will be given the opportunity to spend a summer in a professional position with the United States Department of State.

Public Health Informatics Fellowship Program at CDC:

This program at CDC provides training and experience for its participants to effectively apply computer and information science and technology to real public health problems, including the ability to lead and manage all aspects of the design, development and implementation of public health information systems.

White House Fellows

Founded in 1964, the White House Fellows program is one of America's most prestigious programs for leadership and public service. White House Fellowships offer exceptional young men and women first-hand experience working at the highest levels of the federal government. Selected individuals typically spend a year working as a full-time, paid Fellow to senior White House Staff, Cabinet Secretaries and other top-ranking government officials.

WHERE CAN YOU FIND A LIST OF FELLOWSHIP PROGRAMS?

Good question. You can find fellowships on USAJOBS.gov by doing an advanced search for "Fellowship" or a thorough list can be found at this address:

- http://www.experience.com/alumnus/article?channel_id=government&source_page=home&article_id=article_1142516799734

Also, be sure to check out GovLoop's list of government fellowships here:

- <https://data.govloop.com/Government/Government-Hiring-Programs/m9jz-wxtp>

If you're looking for state and local fellowships, you can probably find a few at:

- <http://publicservicecareers.org>

DIRECT HIRE AUTHORITY

We wanted to quickly touch on other direct hiring authorities. As Charles DeLuca, an Economist at the IRS, said, "Special hiring programs are very useful, but not applicable to most." Here's what you need to know:

Direct-Hire Authority (DHA) is an appointing (hiring) authority that the Office of Personnel Management can give to Federal agencies for filling vacancies when a critical hiring need or severe shortage of candidates exists. If you qualify for a position under a DHA, you've got a great start at landing a job!

Some think that DHA is only for Veterans, those with disabilities, or minorities, but you can be hired under DHA for a variety of other positions that might be more applicable to the broader population:

- positions involved in Iraqi Reconstruction efforts (requires fluency in Arabic or related language)
- positions in Federal Acquisition
- Information Technology Management (Information Security)

Where can you find a full list of current government wide direct hire authorities? OPM provides a convenient list of current positions they have provided with direct hire authorities [here](#).

Below we quickly highlight some common direct hire authorities and hiring preferences for Veterans (and spouses), people with disabilities, and minorities.

VETERANS PREFERENCE (SPOUSAL PREFERENCE)

If you are a veteran, knowing about these special hiring authorities will help you enhance your job search. It is important to note that veterans are not entitled to appointment under these authorities, but that the agencies may use them entirely at their discretion. These positions can be for full time, part time, long term, and temporary positions.

You are eligible for Veterans' Recruitment Appointment (VRA) if you:

- are in receipt of a campaign badge for service during a war or in a campaign or expedition; **OR**
- are a disabled veteran, **OR**
- are in receipt of an Armed forces Service Medal for participation in a military operation, **OR**
- are a recently separated veteran (within the last 3 years), **AND**
- separated under honorable conditions (this means an honorable or general discharge), you are VRA eligible.

You must provide documentation of your preference / appointment eligibility. To see a full list of requirements and forms please see www.FedsHireVets.gov.

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

If you are a person with disabilities, there are special programs in place to assist you in your search for a job. Most agencies have a Selective Placement Program Coordinator (SPPC) who helps management recruit, hire, and accommodate people with disabilities. These SPPCs help determine the essential duties of the positions and modifications needed for people with disabilities, help advise candidates about special hiring authorities, and monitor / evaluate programs and make changes as needed.

Federal agencies are required by law to provide reasonable accommodations to qualified employees with disabilities. These accommodations can include interpreters, readers, or personal assistance, modified job duties, restructured worksites, providing flexible schedules and sites (ex: teleworking), and adapting technology and equipment.

For a full overview of the accommodations made for persons with disabilities please see:

<http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/disability-employment/>

MINORITIES

OPM has sustained efforts to create a more diverse federal workforce as a model of equality, diversity, and inclusion. OPM has is-

sued government-wide inclusion and diversity strategies, which focus on diversity, workplace inclusion, and sustainability. Recently, the OPM has reported that minorities account for 34.1% of the total workforce.

The OPM also renewed the Hispanic Council on Federal Employment (Council) to advise the Director of OPM on the recruitment, hiring, retention, and advancement of Hispanics in the federal workplace.

If you're looking for opportunities that specifically reach out to minorities, there are many fellowships that look for high-achieving people. See the above fellowships section to see a full list of opportunities. Also, be sure to check with the agency you are looking at has any Executive Order hiring practices established.

WHERE TO GET EXPERIENCE TIP

Get Experience with the Public Sector via Consulting, Contracting or a Non-Profit: If you are interested in public service, you do not necessarily have to contribute as a federal employee. The federal government contracts out a large percentage of its work. One good way to get into the public sector on the industry side is to work for one of these consulting companies. They can be quicker to hire, give you opportunities to see a variety of agencies across consulting projects, and may pay a little more. Plus, you often work on-site with other government employees so it is common to eventually get hired by the federal government.

There is a lot of variety in the consulting companies both in terms of size, specialties and pay. Do your homework. Here is [one list of the top 200 government contractors](#) and you can also use Vault to research consulting companies. Federal consulting firms such as Deloitte and Booz Allen Hamilton hire a lot of recent graduates, while more technical consulting companies often require past consulting experiences, certifications and (sometimes) clearances. You can also check out fbo.gov for contracting opportunities.

When students ask which route to go, we usually still encourage federal employment. Although your salary may start lower, it goes up faster and you generally have more responsibility and authority more quickly.

There are also hundreds of non-profits, including government associations that play an important role in improving public service. Non-profits such as the Partnership for Public Service have a fellowship program and hire lots of recent graduates and are a great way to contribute to federal service. Look at the [list of government employee associations](#) and check their websites for openings. You can also use a site like Idealist.org to look for a variety of not-for-profit organizations that get government grants and allow you to gain experience that's right on the fringe of public service, often positioning you effectively for a jump to the agency that administers your program - and this is true on the federal, state and local levels.

HOW DO I UNDERSTAND THE GOVERNMENT HIRING PROCESS?

Searching is just the first hurdle to getting a government job. Once you find a position that interests you, it's always a bit challenging to understand the actual job descriptions. This section is designed to walk you through a typical description and break it down into manageable chunks, hopefully enabling you to weed out the ones that won't work for you. To the right is a screenshot of the top of a federal job announcement on USAJOBS.

1. JOB TITLE

First, in order to get a better sense of the typical titles, GovLoop has put together a simple resource that explains a dozen of the most common positions in government, including a general sense of the type of work you would perform, the education requirements and relevant degrees, as well as links to people who

Department of the Air Force

Job Title: BUDGET ANALYST

Department: Department of the Air Force

Agency: U.S. Air Force - Agency Wide

Job Announcement Number: 9B-DCIPS-814568-835903-CMR

SALARY RANGE: \$50,287.00 to \$65,371.00 / Per Year

OPEN PERIOD: Friday, February 01, 2013 to Tuesday, February 05, 2013

SERIES & GRADE: GG-0560-11

POSITION INFORMATION: Full Time - Excepted Service Permanent

PROMOTION POTENTIAL: 11

DUTY LOCATIONS: 1 vacancy in the following location:
Ramstein Germany [View Map](#)

WHO MAY APPLY: United States Citizens

At the top of each USAJobs announcement page you will find details about the opening that you will want to pay special attention to

have this title now. Click on each link to find the position that you think fits best with your background or aspirations:

- [Administrative Officer / Specialist](#)
- [Budget Analyst](#)
- [Computer Scientist](#)
- [Contract Specialist](#)
- [Financial \(Management\) Analyst](#)
- [Human Resources Specialist](#)
- [IT Specialist](#)
- [Management Analyst](#)
- [Program Analyst](#)
- [Public Affairs Specialist](#)

Of course, these titles aren't exhaustive, but we've likely covered 70% of the jobs where you'd consider submitting an application. GovLoop Founder Steve Ressler described a few of them in this way:

- [Program Analyst](#) - Really all this job means is "jack of all trades." Can you read/write/speak/analyze? This is the category for you. Agencies hire under program analyst categories for a variety of jobs.
- [Budget/Financial Analyst](#) - Like stats/numbers? There are tons of budget/finance jobs where you help the agency plan and execute the budget. They are always in need of smart people and these jobs offer a great career trajectory.
- [Acquisitions](#) - Do you like buying stuff? Acquisition is the government's buyers. This is the most in-demand field in government and, honestly, one of the core skills any government leader needs.
- [Human Resources](#) - Some people think HR is lame and that it's a lot of paper pushing, but HR is moving to less of a paperwork field and more of a strategic "how do we manage talent?" There is lots of interesting work, tons of jobs, and a real need for MPA/MPP skills
- [Information Technology](#) - There is a huge need for IT workers. Most of the openings are for mid-level folks, but there is a shortage of folks, which presents a great opportunity to

fly up the ladder fast - especially if you love tech, but also can translate tech talk to users and management.

Here's a full list of OPM's [top 20 white-collar government occupations](#).

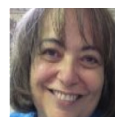
2. SALARY RANGE

Every job announcement will have a salary range. That's one of the nice things about government vacancies - you pretty much know what you'd be making for the next ten years if all goes well in terms of annual step increases (not accounting for those occasional, pesky pay freezes).

We already talked about the salary ranges above, including the current pay scale (page 13), so you have some sense of what these ranges mean. Your default might be to look at the larger number in the range and think that you could negotiate right into the upper end of that grade level. Be careful in that thinking. You might have some wiggle room in the initial back and forth about compensation, but we'd urge you to see the lower end of the range as your most likely starting point. Don't fret, but also don't get ahead of yourself. You can often count on that that step increase each year along with cost of living adjustments...or you can make a move into a job at another grade level once you're in the federal system.

3. OPEN PERIOD

This one is pretty self-explanatory - it's basically the date range for when you can submit an application. What's important to note here is the length of that period. Originally, our recommendation was that if an announcement is open for less than two weeks, it's probably "wired" for someone already in the agency. Then we talked to Doris Tirone, a Human Resources Specialist at NASA, who said that two weeks is actually pretty standard, especially because agencies have an 80-day period to fill positions from the time they are posted. Specifically, Doris told us:



"Ten calendar days is the norm. That comes from hiring reforms enacted in 2010, which made the hiring process more consistent between organizations. Now please note that it isn't a requirement that vacancies be posted for 10 days. OPM suggests an open

FEELING READY TO SUPERVISE PEOPLE?

Often these titles above will have "Supervisory" in front of them - and it means just that. You will have people under your direct management in those positions. If you feel like you're ready for that kind of responsibility or have that level of experience, you're usually bumping yourself up several steps of pay and performance expectations. Our hunch is that most entry level positions for people getting into government will not be supervisory, so it could be one way you narrow your search. Make sure you have the right background and experience or you could be wasting your time with an application. The salary range might look nicer on those announcements...but you might also be less qualified.

period of at least five business days, but the requirement is simply to allow for open period that provides an adequate amount of time to give the public notice of a vacancy. In many cases, agencies have adopted a 10-day standard, but it could be more or less depending on the agency's recruitment plan."

Now, it's not a bad idea to look for jobs with multiple vacancies or a longer open period as it might mean that an agency is casting the net especially wide. In fact, one federal applicant shaped his strategy in this way:

"I didn't apply to any that only had one position available. I looked for a minimum open period of one month that had 'multiple' vacancies."

Translation: Don't be afraid of the openings with a short fuse. Throw your hat in the ring – and don't wait. If you're especially clever, you'll leverage an agency hiring spree and avoid the crowded lines for the harder-to-get jobs.

4. SERIES AND GRADE

Just in case you've never heard of series, grade and step, here's the simplest way to break it down:

- **Series:** This is the occupational code we were talking about above. Classification in government can get pretty complicated, so the easiest way to explain this is that it's an area of specialty. You may read all about the different occupational codes in [this nifty handbook](#).
- **Grade:** Rate of basic pay associated with a specific level of work or range of difficulty, responsibility and qualification requirements.
- **Step:** There are 10 steps within a grade under which an employee is paid. For example, you could be step 2 of a GS 7 or step 6 of a GS 11.

In government, your salary changes by moving up (and down) the GS scale. Most white collar, entry-level positions will be in the GS 7-9

range (\$30 - \$40K per year), so that's a fair place to set your initial expectations. It's a safe bet that for a GS-7 position you'll need a Bachelor's degree, a GS-9 you'll need a Master's degree, and for a GS-11 or higher you'll need a PhD. Some jobs will hire only for a specific grade, but many will hire at different grades and that will be clearly indicated in the position description. We recommend that you apply throughout the chain to increase your chances of landing a job!

5. POSITION INFORMATION

This is pretty easy to figure out – and we covered "Excepted Service" in a text box above (page 18). If you have any questions about your eligibility, just pick up the phone and call the contact person listed on the job announcement to learn more.

Still feel a little fuzzy on this topic? Here's some more reading about [excepted service](#) and [competitive service](#).

6. PROMOTION

Do you want to know if you can eventually move up a grade from this position once you've proven yourself? "Promotion" is where you find out. Some announcements might list one grade higher, but others might find you limited to that grade only: you start at GS 11 and stay in GS 11 unless you get a new job.

Toni Harris, Director of Career Services and Alumni Relations at New York University's Wagner School of Public Service, says that if you're looking at a job's promotion potential, "a job that has a range is a great sign." So if the position you're looking at shows a range of GS levels, that's one way to know that advancement is possible.

You might also be wondering how quickly you can move up. Typically, your pay escalates by one step each year. It's actually somewhat rare to jump a couple steps at a time. If you're eager to get ahead faster, you'll either want to look for positions with better promotion potential or you'll need to apply for another opportunity down the road.

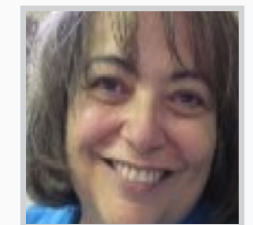
Some jobs have the potential for noncompetitive promotion and others do not; it depends on how the position is structured.

"On average, new graduates should look for jobs at the GS-5 and GS-7 pay grades.

Here's how it breaks down, generally speaking:

- **GS-5** = Entry level, straight out of college
- **GS-7** = Undergraduate with a grade point average above 3.0 OR with a bachelor's degree and one year of relevant experience
- **GS-9** = People with a master's degree OR with a bachelor's plus one year of relevant experience equivalent to a GS-7
- **GS-11** = Mid-career people who are ready to take the next step; they have their master's or bachelor's + 5 years experience; also people with a PhD fit here

If you have a masters degree, look to the GS-9 - **BUT if you have a Master's degree, don't say you won't take a GS-7. Be willing to take the GS-7. Get your foot in the door and have more opportunities down the road.** Sometimes those GS-7s have promotion potential to the GS-12 level. In three years, you could go from GS-7 to GS-12. Don't disqualify yourself. **Go for the lowest grade level you are willing to accept, not just the one you're qualified for."**



Doris Tirone,
Human Resources Specialist, NASA

We can't overemphasize the truth of this statement – just get your foot in the door. Once you're in the system, you've got more room to maneuver.

HERE'S ANOTHER QUICK GOVLOOP RESSLER TIP:

All jobs have a grade and all openings have promotion potential. This is huge and you should look for jobs that have promotion potential to GS-12 (and you hit the jackpot if it goes to GS-13).

For jobs with promotion potential, promotions may occur after you have:

- worked at the lower grade level for at least one year;
- performed at an acceptable level of competence;
- and demonstrated your ability to perform work at the next higher grade level.

For example, a position advertised at the GS-11 level with promotion potential to the GS-13 level means that you would be eligible for promotion to the GS-12 level at the end of your first year of employment. Once promoted to the GS-12 level, you would be eligible for promotion to the GS-13 level at the end of a year.

It also depends on whether the job is one grade interval job or a two-grade interval job. A job that goes up to the 12 or 13 level is probably a two grade interval job - so the normal progression would appear in the job description like this: 5/7/9/11/12/13 and the promotion happens like this:

- 5 to 7 = one year (even though you are going up two grades)
- 7 to 9 = one year (even though you are going up two grades)
- 9 to 11 = one year
- 11 to 12 = one year
- 12 to 13 = one year

Again, this varies, but we'd encourage you to look for some of the two-hop opportunities. For those who like to get the official scoop, please go here:

<http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/pay-administration/fact-sheets/within-grade-increases/>

7. DUTY LOCATIONS

You might think this is straightforward: this is the physical place where you'll work. That's true, but there's a trick here that most newcomers to government don't know. Sometimes there are multiple vacancies or multiple duty locations. If you find a job announcement with that kind of information, your odds of getting the job just ratcheted up about 17 notches. That means the agency is likely hiring a bunch of positions under this particular title.

Think about when the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) was hiring agents for airports across the country. That's the equivalent of a gold rush for people trying to get into government jobs. If you stumble upon one of these announcements and you feel like it's a solid match, don't hesitate to apply (and be flexible where you'd be willing to work, if possible - that increases your chances even more!).

8. WHO MAY APPLY

Again, you may think this one is obvious, but sometimes the agency wants a specific kind of person. Take this example to the right that wants only people who've worked in a particular facility.

Make sure you only apply for jobs that are available to U.S. Citizens. About 60% of government jobs are only for current feds - don't waste your time applying for those. Hint: This is a filter you can choose on Jobs.GovLoop.

9. DUTIES

The next section you'll find is the "Duties." This is often pretty straightforward. It gives you a sense of what you'll do in this job. Read it all carefully. The part where you'll want to take some notes is if it starts using language about the position itself. For instance, in the position to the right, we've boxed out some of the stuff you'll want to measure your resume against. If you've done this kind of thing, start to map and adapt your resume to the exact language you see here. That becomes even more important in the next section. We cannot overstate the importance of carefully looking at this section and the Qualifications section of a job description.

10. QUALIFICATIONS

Most federal resume experts will tell you that this is the most important part of the job announcement. If you want the job, you've got to borrow the language here and speckle it throughout your own resume. We talk more about that below, but see the graphic below for what you might want to do with the typical announcement. Donna

Veterans Health Administration
VAcareers.va.gov

Job Title: Social Worker (PEC)-Social Work Service
Department: Department Of Veterans Affairs
Agency: Veterans Affairs, Veterans Health Administration
Job Announcement Number: VHA-558-13-DUR-835309-SJR

SALARY RANGE: \$48,895.00 to \$76,902.00 / Per Year
OPEN PERIOD: Thursday, January 31, 2013 to Thursday, February 14, 2013
SERIES & GRADE: GS-0185-09/11
POSITION INFORMATION: Full Time - Excepted Service Permanent
DUTY LOCATIONS: 1 vacancy in the following location:
Durham, NC United States [View Map](#)
WHO MAY APPLY: Current Permanent DURHAM VAMC Employees & Durham VCS Employees ONLY
JOB SUMMARY:

DUTIES: [Back to top](#)
This position is a Defense Civilian Intelligence Personnel Systems (DCIPS) position implemented under Section 504, Title V of Public Law 99-569, Intelligence Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1987, as codified in Sec 1601, Chap 83 of Title 10 United States Code which sets forth Air Force policies and procedures for DCIPS. The position is in the excepted service. Any United States citizen may apply.

This is an Occupational Grade 11 job in the Defense Civilian Intelligence Personnel System (DCIPS). Grade 11 duties for the Professional work category are at the Full Performance work level.

The organizational location of this position is: Air Force Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance Agency (AFISRA), 480th Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance Wing (480 ISR WG), 693 ISR GP, Resource Advisor Office, Ramstein AB GE

MAJOR DUTIES: Budget Analyst

- Serves as the functional point of contact for day-to-day budget/financial issues.
- Performs budget formulation work involving preparation of detailed analysis of annual and/or multi-year budget estimates for assigned organizations/programs into a consolidated budget request.
- Performs budget execution and administration work involving the monitoring of obligations incurred and the actual expenditures of a budget with different sources and types of funding.
- Provides advice, assistance, and guidance on budgeting and related information.

QUALIFICATIONS REQUIRED: [Back to top](#)

QUALIFICATION REQUIREMENTS:

A. MINIMUM QUALIFICATION REQUIREMENTS: Applicants must possess one year of specialized experience at the next lower qualifying pay band or equivalent grade under the General Schedule (GS) or other pay systems. Equivalent experience may be at the level of the lowest GS grade covered by the applicable pay band; however, the experience must demonstrate your ability to apply the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA'S) to successfully perform the duties of the position being filled. Examples of creditable specialized experience include: Knowledge that has equipped the applicant with the particular competencies/knowledge, skills, and abilities to successfully perform the duties of the position and is typically in or related to the work of the position to be filled. Such experience is typically gained in the Financial Management field or through the performance of work where the primary concern is Financial Management. The employing agency is responsible for defining the specialized experience based on the requirements of the position being filled.

B. EDUCATION: A Ph.D. or equivalent doctoral degree OR 3 full years of progressively higher level graduate education leading to such a degree or LL.M., if related.

-OR-

C. Equivalent combinations of education and experience are qualifying for which both education and experience are acceptable.
<http://www.opm.gov/qualifications/Standards/group-stds/gs-admin.asp>

KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND ABILITIES (KSAs): Your qualifications will be evaluated on the basis of your level of knowledge, skills, abilities and/or competencies in the following areas:

1. Knowledge of commonly used budgetary methods, practices, procedures, regulations, policies, and processes to formulate, justify, and execute the budget for assigned budget accounts
2. Knowledge of missions, functions, goals, objectives, work processes, and sources of funding pertinent to installation programs/organizations
3. Skill in the application of methods and techniques (e.g., cost-benefit analysis, ZBB, amortization, depreciation, and pro-rating revenues and costs among customers) to analyze and evaluate the effects of changes in program plans and funding.
4. Ability to gather, assemble, and analyze data to prepare budget estimates, develop alternatives, and make recommendations to resolve budget/funding problems.
5. Ability to communicate effectively, both orally and in writing, to justify, defend, present, and/or advise on budgetary processes/actions.

Dyer, Director of Career Services for Duke University's Sanford School of Public Policy, explains her process of helping potential applicants:



"We instruct students to prepare their resumes by looking at verbs and, hopefully, if a job description is well-written, great verbs will be used. For instance, the agency will say 'we want someone to calculate, analyze, write, communicate' - that's a good first cut at figuring out if you can reasonably apply and describe yourself as competent in those areas."

We conduct workshops with students in which we look at job descriptions and ask them to highlight verbs and keywords that they think the hiring manager really, really feels strongly about. Sometimes it will say 'must know French' - that's easy. Sometimes it will say, 'UN language preferred.' I still think that means 'must know French' because there are so many people in the queue that if you don't know any of the UN languages -- or whatever the requirement is -- then you're not going to rise to the top.

In other words, we do a lot of work in helping them to identify the "deal breakers" that would keep them from applying. It's kind of a negative approach, but it's such a difficult process that it's better to exclude yourself before you go to the trouble to apply. Carefully reading for keywords and deal breakers is the most important of the whole process."

Another government careers expert, Camille Roberts, echoed Dyer's advice when it comes to considering a potential position. Roberts suggested asking yourself a couple questions and do a quick assessment:



Does the description sound like something you would like to do? Does the description sound like something you are qualified to do?

Read the qualifications very carefully. Rate your knowledge on a scale from 1 to 5.

- 1=No knowledge or experience or transferable/relevant skills.
- 2=Fair knowledge, no experience or transferable/relevant skills.
- 3=Good knowledge, no experience, but have transferable/relevant skills.
- 4=Excellent knowledge, experience, and transferable/relevant skills.
- 5=Advanced knowledge, experience, and transferable/relevant skills.

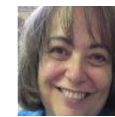
If you have more 1's and 2's than 3, 4, 5, you probably are not a good fit. Read the specialized experience and be sure you have examples that will demonstrate your knowledge, skills, and abilities. Even if you think the job might be "pegged" for an internal candidate, apply anyway. You never know unless you try.

So hone in on those keywords and look for the "deal breakers." (Please also note that these verbs and keywords are also important when it comes to working up your resume. They represent the language that you'll want to weave into your professional experience... but we're getting ahead of ourselves. Of course, if you want to jump ahead, check out the resume tips on p. 60 below.)

Now you ought to know one more very important piece of advice before you virtually copy the job description language into your resume. We talked to an agency Human Resources Specialist who, in the next section, shares some very important information about preparing your application materials.

WHAT'S GOING ON DURING THE APPLICATION REVIEW PROCESS?

Government is notorious for having a long hiring process. It also often feels like you've dropped it into the proverbial black hole after you hit "submit." We wanted to address this phenomena to clear the fog for you (yes, there is someone behind the curtain). If you want to see the official version, be sure to review [OPM's Hiring Toolkit for Agencies](#). If you want to hear the behind-the-scenes edition for one agency, read the vignette below that was shared with us by Doris Tirone, a Human Resources Specialist at NASA:



"In advance of opening the announcement, the HR Specialist has completed a job analysis which identifies the criteria that are going to help us identify the difference between a good candidate and a great candidate. From there, we build and post the job announcement.

YOUR FEDERAL RESUME: BEHIND-THE-SCENES

1 Many agencies use evaluative software to assist them in reviewing applications. In these instances, USAJOBS is used as an electronic, web-based application to collect resumes. When the vacancy announcement closes, we track (ask for) those resumes and move them into our agency's web-based application. We can receive anywhere from 300 to 700 to 1,000 applications. Right now, we're working with an average of 400 applications per grade level announced.

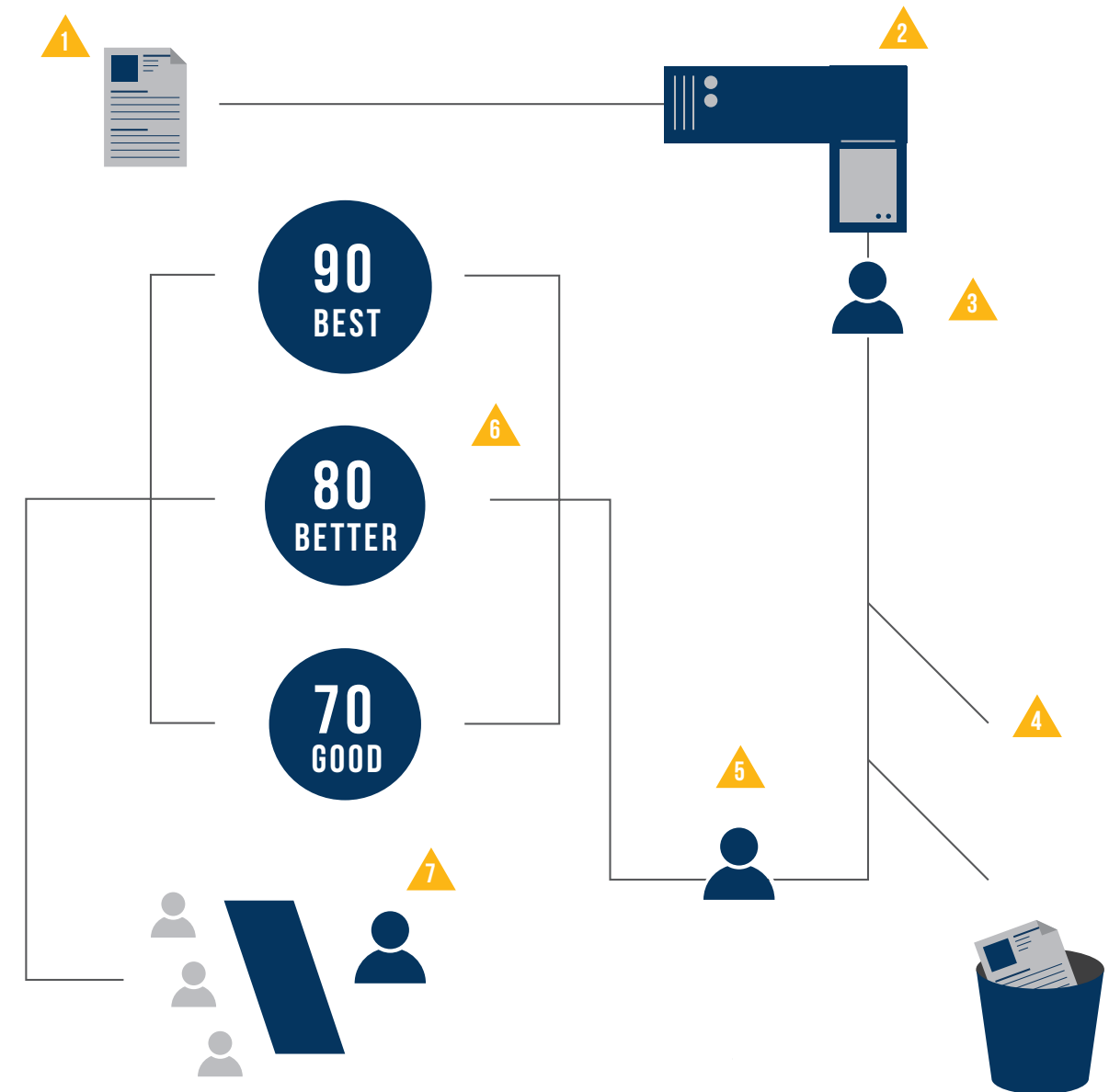
2 Based on our job analysis and the criteria derived from that analysis, we use the system as a tool to separate applications and tell us how many candidates fall into each qualifying group. This is called "Category Rating". Typically, there are three groups: the good, the better and the best. When a human resources specialist sees an application, it's usually because they 'basically qualify' (i.e., they fall at least into the lowest of the qualifying categories).

3 The human resource specialist who's doing their job is reading all those resumes and trying to verify the accuracy of the information that has been provided by the tool. If an applicant says they are basically qualified and we find that they don't meet the minimum qualifications for consideration, it is our job to disqualify them.

4 In order to be qualified there are some basic requirements. For instance, you may need to have a certain level of education. If you don't have it, you're not going to be found basically qualified. The only time an HR Specialist usually sees applications is when the person claims they are qualified for the job, that they have the required education and experience and claim to have the specialized experience.

But here's what happens - and this is the part people don't realize. If applicants are not honest and they say they have what it takes to be basically qualified, it doesn't mean we're going to take the tool's word for it. In many cases, cutting and pasting position descriptions in a person's resume is not the way to assure that you are going to get referred. We see a lot of that. Applicants cut and paste verbiage from the vacancy announcement or out of the position description.

We're reading these resumes - and we're saying, 'this is what he says he can do or what she'd like to do.' Oftentimes, I'll look at someone's resume, and discover, 'This person doesn't have the education. What were they thinking?' and I will disqualify them.



While this is not entirely dishonest, it slows down the process. The more honest an applicant is, the faster the HR Specialists can do their jobs (and for those who are qualified, this is appreciated as well).

5 Once we know an applicant is basically qualified, the next step is to evaluate applicants based on those pre-determined skills criteria and separate candidates into those who are basically qualified, those who are better qualified, and those who are best qualified. We do that by reading the resumes again.

That's why the resumes are so critical, because we are looking for examples that support the specialized experience requirements that are necessary to be considered. If we don't see actual examples of experience that show us that a person actually did the job, they are disqualified.

6 *Once we find the people who meet the basic qualifications like general experience and education, and they have the specialized experience as well, the system separates candidates into three groups; our tool separates candidates into groups labeled '90', '80' and '70'.*

We want to refer at least three people from the highest group of qualified applicants, so we look at the top group of candidates first. If there are disabled veterans in the pool, their applications float to the top of the highest group; other veterans float to the top of group in which they qualify. This is called "Veterans' Preference" and these are the candidates we consider first. If there are no qualified veterans in the highest group of qualified applicants, we refer all other candidates who are in the highest group of qualified applicants.

Now if there aren't three people in the highest group of qualified candidates, we're allowed to merge groups together and create one group out of the 90s and 80s. Then we look again at the veterans who have floated to the top of this new group ... this is what preference is all about...but the only time this happens is if we don't have enough candidates to refer from that highest initial group.

7 *Our goal is to refer at least three people so the hiring official will have a sufficient number of people to interview. Otherwise, it's up to the hiring official to ask us to merge groups. 'If you can't merge them and get me three people, then I am going to cancel this announcement and start over.' Or maybe we'll use one of those hiring flexibilities and do a direct hire."*

Ultimately, in consultation with the human resources office, they come to a decision and issue a certificate of eligible candidates to consider. That's when the interview comes into play, which we'll cover below. A few other insider nuggets from Doris include:

- **There are time limits on the process.** "OPM gives an agency 80 days from the date of the announcement to fill a position, so the process shouldn't drag out for 6 months. "At our agency, we have a 3 to 5 day metric to evaluate applications after the vacancy closes."

- **The HR folks know their stuff.** "OPM certifies each and every one of us. The only people who are allowed to do applicant vetting are people who have gone through OPM's certification training - and we have to keep our certification current. We have to re-certify every three years. That means going back through the training, being re-tested and being re-certified."

- **Sometimes HR folks are just overwhelmed.** Agencies where it seems to take longer are likely to be short-staffed: "There might be only one HR Specialist who is handling ten vacancy announcements at one time and at various stages in the process ((Author math note: that's 10 x 400 applications!). There are only so many hours in a day and you don't really want an HR Specialist doing analysis after eight hours anyway. In those cases, it could take longer. I could not vet ten vacancy announcements in ten days. The time it takes to vet applications really just depends on how the agency staffing operation is set up."

- **"Once the scores are determined, they can't be changed.** In most cases, scores are determined through an electronic application system that's been coded before the vacancy is ever posted, and it's based on a job analysis of the position." You can't influence the hiring manager or HR person, even if they wanted to like you and pass you through. It just doesn't work that way.

With all that being said, let's jump back to some wisdom from Toni Harris, who mentions this about the "black hole" of USAJOBS applications:



"Patience is a skill you need to master when applying to federal jobs. Besides, you have no control over the hiring manager's process. Focus your energy on what you can control: putting forth an impeccable application and building a network to support your job search. Everything else is out of your hands."

BREATHE.

IF YOU'RE BEST QUALIFIED, THE CALL WILL COME.

SHOULD I SUBMIT 100 OR 10 APPLICATIONS?

While we have heard stories of people submitting 100 applications (and actually got a job!), we would not recommend that approach. Instead, it's a much better use of your time to conduct a targeted search, tailor your resume and application, and make sure you're putting your best foot forward each time you're throwing your hat in the ring. Listen to some advice from Camille Roberts again, who says:

“Be selective. Don't apply for something for the sake of applying if it is a stretch. Take time to read the announcement CAREFULLY. See if you are a good fit. Be sure you qualify. Apply with quality in mind, not quantity. It only takes one.”

That being said, she also acknowledged that “The federal employment landscape is a tedious and long process. Be prepared for that. Set realistic expectations and plan ahead.” While you want to be more targeted, she also said, “Do not apply to one position and stop. Apply to several at a time, if you qualify.”

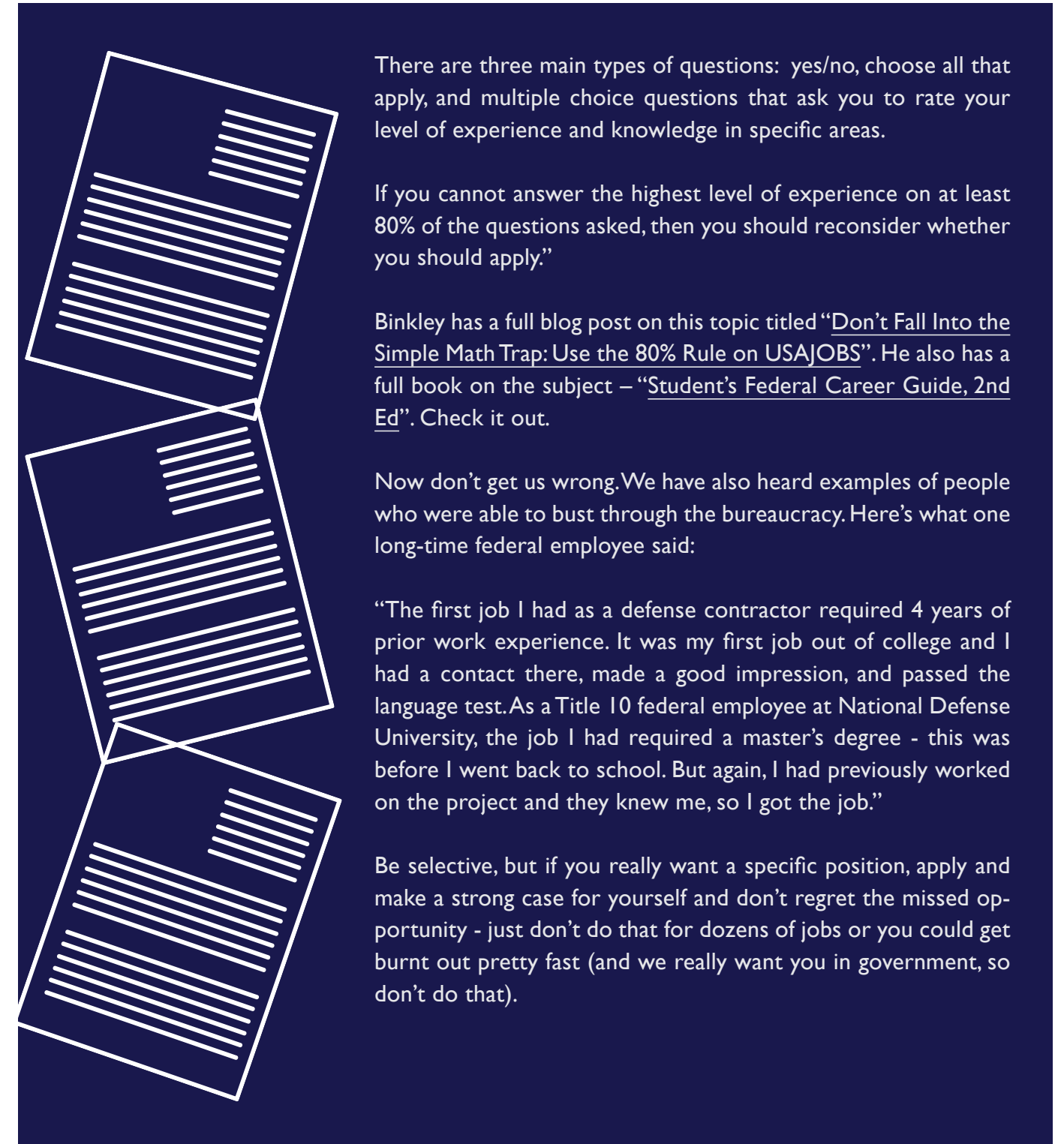


GOVERNMENT CAREER ADVISOR AND AUTHOR PAUL BINKLEY SUMS IT UP THIS WAY:

“Don't fall into the simple math trap -- the more positions I apply to, the better my chances. In my mind, quality trumps quantity 99 times out of a 100 for so many reasons, not the least of which is how much time and effort it takes to submit a really good application.

He goes on to say:

“Most positions posted to USAJOBS have a questionnaire to identify the best qualified individuals. You can usually preview the questionnaire via a link in the How to Apply section of the job announcement.



There are three main types of questions: yes/no, choose all that apply, and multiple choice questions that ask you to rate your level of experience and knowledge in specific areas.

If you cannot answer the highest level of experience on at least 80% of the questions asked, then you should reconsider whether you should apply.”

Binkley has a full blog post on this topic titled “[Don't Fall Into the Simple Math Trap: Use the 80% Rule on USAJOBS](#)”. He also has a full book on the subject – “[Student's Federal Career Guide, 2nd Ed](#)”. Check it out.

Now don't get us wrong. We have also heard examples of people who were able to bust through the bureaucracy. Here's what one long-time federal employee said:

“The first job I had as a defense contractor required 4 years of prior work experience. It was my first job out of college and I had a contact there, made a good impression, and passed the language test. As a Title 10 federal employee at National Defense University, the job I had required a master's degree - this was before I went back to school. But again, I had previously worked on the project and they knew me, so I got the job.”

Be selective, but if you really want a specific position, apply and make a strong case for yourself and don't regret the missed opportunity - just don't do that for dozens of jobs or you could get burnt out pretty fast (and we really want you in government, so don't do that).

WHAT'S THE BEST LOCATION - HEADQUARTERS OR THE FIELD?

While you might think that the default answer is “headquarters,” a better answer might be “both.” Again, we turn to government career expert Lily Whiteman for some insight. By striving to get experience in both the headquarters and field offices, you will:

- learn about the ways in which relationships between headquarters and the field can be strained due to geographic and cultural differences
- position yourself as the go-to person for bridging the gulf among ‘warring’ worlds
- gain street cred for a future senior executive position by having multi-locational experience
- learn to relate well to people in unique contexts
- speed time to completion of projects that might otherwise get held up by hand-wringing and political power struggles
- pad your professional networking list through nationwide contacts

And don't forget: 80% of the government workforce is not in Washington, DC. Why not work closer to home, if you can, and build up valuable experience that could fast track your career down the road?

Also, keep an eye out for large specialty offices. They usually have higher grades than normal field positions. For example, the Department of Agriculture has a big part of their CIO office in Kansas City, Missouri. The US Citizen and Immigration Services and Immigration and Customs Enforcement have a big office in Burlington, Vermont, where people process immigration issues. The Environmental Protection Agency has a large contracting office in Cincinnati, Ohio. Customs and Border Protection has a large part of their Chief Financial Officer team in Indianapolis, Indiana. Be sure to do some sleuthing and find out if there's a cool city where you'd want to break in and spend some time getting experience and rising up the ranks.

By the way, if you get Lily Whiteman's book, you can find a great table

on pages 40-44 with the relative advantages and disadvantages of working in either the field or headquarters.

That being said, positions generally have a higher grade at headquarters and a higher percentage of the senior government positions are located in DC. You are closer to power and it is easier to move around agencies in DC. So please know that we are not discouraging you from applying to opportunities in DC. Just don't feel like you have to be there if you want to work somewhere else in the country and still get great federal career experience.

SHOULD I GO WITH THE EXECUTIVE OR LEGISLATIVE BRANCH?

Many students are interested in legislative branch jobs. There are a few legislative agencies that operate similar career paths - agencies like Government Accountability Office (GAO), Congressional Research Service (CRS), and Library of Congress are popular with recent graduates as they have several research and oversight positions. In fact, career advisor Donna Dyer at Duke recommended these kinds of opportunities as a unique way to get into government:



“The smaller, independent agencies and places like GAO and CBO that are legislative branch can be a little bit more critical with their applications and take longer to hire if they don't get applications from candidates who can succeed in their agencies. They are more likely to receive and consider more outside applications until they find the right person for the job...which gives new people a chance to break into government.”

Legislative committees are also popular stops, but generally look for individuals with expertise already in the field of the committee. Capitol Hill legislative positions are worth a book in itself as most of the legislature staff positions are filled with recent graduates and are very low pay, long hours, high responsibility, and high turnover -- and based on the whim of each Congress member. Most of the time in order to land a Hill job, you must either know somebody or have previously interned on the Hill. You can try to get onto a Capitol Hill listserv which will help in getting access to these types of jobs. A couple lists to take a look at would be [Tom Mantos](#) listserv (free) and [Brad Traverse](#) (fee-based).

WHERE IS THERE A LOT OF HIRING HAPPENING IN GOVERNMENT RIGHT NOW?

A lot of the hiring is based on where the action is currently in government. For example, in 2013, a big priority of federal government is implementing the Affordable Care Act. So there are increasingly more vacancies at Health and Human Services, which is the main agency running the program. However, often there is less obvious trickle down effects. For instance, IRS is handling the enforcement side of Affordable Care Act so they have a lot of openings and OPM is handling significant portions of the health insurance coordination and have jobs as well. A good source of information is just following the broader news like The Washington Post as well as niche publications like Federal Times and Government Executive that will report stories like “Patent and Trademark Office pushes to hire 3,000 new patent lawyers.”

Once again, Whiteman has some great insight here:



Congressional staffers help the members of Congress do their jobs: they write and track legislation, research and strategize policy alternatives, plan the appearances of members of Congress, write their speeches, negotiate compromises, communicate with the press, meet with lobbyists, and respond to constituents' concerns.

Indeed, many Hill jobs provide prime opportunities to influence members of Congress and thereby influence history...But despite the power that may accompany Hill jobs, Hill careers involve some relative disadvantages. For one thing, only about 30,000 staffers work on the Hill (and a relatively small number of staffers work in the district offices of members of Congress), so the Hill accounts for only a very small percentage of the federal workforce.

Whiteman goes on to explain that “Congress hires lawyers, economists, communications experts, experts on various policy issues, IT professionals, procurement managers, administrative assistants and many other types of professionals.” Note that these jobs are not found on USAJOBS. You can learn more about those opportunities here:

- <http://thehill.com/resources/classifieds/employer>
- <http://www.opajobs.com/capitol-hill-jobs.html>
- <http://www.house.gov/content/jobs/>
- <http://www.senate.gov/employment/po/positions.htm>

Finally, don't forget about state legislative opportunities. You can find a [full list of jobs](#) and a wealth of information about those kinds of opportunities at the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL).

HOW DO I CUT THROUGH A CROWDED FIELD OF CANDIDATES?

IN GENERAL: GOVERNMENT JOB APPLICATIONS

So you've learned how to discover the right job for you and how to decipher the pesky and peculiar government hiring process. So how do you ensure that you deliver the goods - making sure that you drive home the point that you're qualified and ready to rock a government job? That's a great question and it just so happens to be the one we're going to answer next - from having a stellar resume and application to acing the interview to knowing when to follow up to building an impeccable network of people who will vouch for you or give you good advice about getting into government.

From the outset, you should probably know this reality (as articulated by Camille Roberts):



"You can no longer think, 'just get me in front of the hiring manager and I can take it from there.' It is much more than that. You need to research the organization. Find out what they do. Find out their product or service. You must be the solution provider. You have to have a combination of many things at the right time, and a little bit of luck always helps, too."

We'd like to think that this guide (and this section, in particular) will make you more than lucky.

THE GOVERNMENT RESUME: WHEN COOKIE CUTTERS WON'T WORK

The USAJOBS resume builder may seem like something you don't need to do figuring you already have your resume conveniently in a .doc or .pdf format, but here's what one current federal intern says:

"Build your resume in USAJOBS rather than submitting a resume using another format to ensure all required info is submitted."

HR Specialist Doris Tirone at NASA echoed this sentiment:

"I can always tell the difference when someone submits an application through a website other than USAJOBS...and they often have a low rate of success."

GovLoop has developed [a great infographic](#) with tips on using the USAJOBS Resume Builder to make your resume the best it can be. In summary: pay attention to keywords in job descriptions as recruiters look for them, be concise, use numbers to highlight your accomplishments.

Are you worried that you don't have enough experience? Here's what noted government careers expert Camille Roberts would say, in general, to applicants who are just coming out of school:



"Follow directions on the job announcement. Translate your school/college projects into transferrable skills that relate to the job. If you were the team leader on a project, include it! If you were in a supporting role, include it. Think about your college projects like a job. What role did you play? If you are currently in college and avoid those types of activities, get involved. Participate in activities that are offered. Write about the results. If you were selected to present the results, state it."

GovLoop also has created a helpful "[Rock Your Resume](#)" group that has resume tips, examples of resume transformations and a chance to ask your peers to critique your resume to make sure it's ready for prime time. We've listed the basic tips below - follow these resume guidelines and you'll be on the fast track to a government job!

1. BASICS: FORMATTING

- Use 11pt font. 10pt is difficult to read and 12pt takes up too much space
- Use a serif font like Times New Roman. This will make it easier to read.
- Use bullets. Most employers can't be bothered to read full paragraphs.
- Avoid using tables and templates to format your resume. If you send a Microsoft Word version of your resume, employers can see the lines of the template, while the formatting of tables can often be distorted when converted to PDF.
- For Federal positions, make section headings match those of USAJOBS Resume Builder.
- Don't waste valuable real estate!
 - Don't go overboard with the size of your name. Most employers can read it at 11pt just as well as they can at 20pt, but at 11pt it doesn't take up as much space.
 - Don't use the same resume header from the first page on each subsequent page. It not only takes up space, but could lead an employer who finds only one page of your resume to think it is the first page.
 - Margins for your resume should be no larger than 1" and no smaller than 0.7".
 - Don't waste space saying "references available upon request." Employers know this!

2. QUICK! GRAB THEIR ATTENTION!

- Keep in mind: your resume needs to make an impact within 5-10 seconds!
- Speak the language of the prospective employer. Be sure to use keywords from the position description to describe your skills and accomplishments.
- Leave out the generic "objective" section.

- In federal resumes, include a “summary” section after your name and contact info. This should be a brief 3-4 line profile summary, incorporating keywords from the position description.
- For federal resumes, you can also craft a “Core Competencies” section by using keywords from the job announcement along with your expertise and skills. Again, target each job announcement by addressing employers’ specific needs.

3. STRUCTURE YOUR EXPERIENCE

- Consider using a “modified chronological” format. This is a hybrid version of the functional and chronological that is organized in reverse chronological order, but has subsections focused on the skill set the employer has said they need. Each description, then, has longer bullet points that are focused on specific skill sets determined by the job announcement.
- Make the last subsection of every position description a “Key Accomplishments” section.
- Nothing on your resume is more important than your accomplishments. If you don’t share how you affected an organization or how your output was used, employers won’t get the full picture. After you write each bullet point, ask yourself “so what?” Whenever possible, quantify your accomplishments. In place of measurable accomplishments, give as much detail as you can.

4. EDUCATE YOURSELF

- Move your education section after your professional experience, even if you are in school. Hiring managers tend to be more interested in your experience than in your course work.
- List education experience in reverse chronological order.
- Include graduation dates, GPA, and related coursework.
- Did you write a thesis or do research projects? If so, include their titles.
- If your GPA is based on a 4.0 scale, there is no need to say so.
- Consider including capstone projects as pro bono experience in your experience section.

5. POLISH YOUR WRITING STYLE

- Write using a sentence structure, but don’t use “I.”
- Spell out all acronyms when they appear the first time.
- Do not use contractions.
- Don’t use passive voice!
- Cut out articles like a, an, the, etc.

Start each bullet point with an action verb and use verbs found in the position description. Avoid using verbs like conduct, perform, play, prepare, administer, support, assist, maintain, or the dreaded “responsibilities included.” Those passive verbs don’t give you the credit you deserve!

6. BE CONSISTENT!

- Think you’re done? Go back and check your entire resume for consistency of:
 - formatting (space, font, etc.);
 - tense;
 - punctuation;
 - date format (use month and year); and
 - bullets.
- Paste your final resume into a text file and replace any bullets or other symbols that don’t translate well into an asterisk (*) or other keyboard symbol. Double check for consistency, then you can simply copy and paste your clean resume into the USAJobs Resume Builder.

In addition to these gems, the Harris School of Public Policy at the University of Chicago has some excellent resume and curriculum vitae templates for a variety of positions and experience levels:

<http://harrisschool.uchicago.edu/career-development/for-students/career-management-skills-development>

If you decide to use any of these templates, don’t forget to follow the guidelines we’ve laid out above.

“Leave nothing to chance! Everyone knows the old adage regarding what happens when you assume something. Well, the same applies to federal internship and job searching. An HR specialist will likely be the first person to score your USAJOBS federal resume. Their role is to be exclusive, not inclusive. Approach writing your federal resume so that every skill and qualification is spelled out with keywords used in the original announcement.”



Bryan Kempton,
Director of the Office of Career Services at the University of Maryland School of Public Policy

Oh - and when you are ready to hit submit, listen to this advice - again, from Camille Roberts:



Follow the steps very carefully and complete every section accurately. Do not leave out the sensitive information such as your salary, supervisors, and GPA. Even if you might not have what you think is a great GPA, include it. Be sure your name is spelled right and that your phone number and email are accurate. I troubleshoot USAJOBS profiles all the time and I am shocked at how many typos I find in names, emails, and phone numbers.

Save your work. Don't embellish your abilities. Be patient and persistent.

Don't apply at the last minute for a job. Take the time to prepare your materials so they are received a day ahead of the deadline in case you have computer/internet issues, or if USAJOBS has an issue.”

That seems like a good idea to us.

PROFESSIONAL REVIEWS AND RESOURCES

If you're really intent on getting a government job and feel like these tips we've laid out above don't bring you far enough, then consider connecting with a professional resume reviewer. Here are some places you could go for help:

- [CC Career Services](#)
- [GovLoop Rock Your Resume Group](#)
- [Federal Prose](#)
- [Heather Krasna](#)
- [Federal Resume Experts](#)
- [Lily Whiteman](#)
- [Federal Resume Writer](#)
- [Resume Place](#)
- [Federal Resumix](#)

COVER LETTERS

Many federal positions do not require cover letters but they are still relevant in many situations. A cover letter should be designed to give the employer the information they need in the shortest most concise form. The purpose of your cover letter is NOT to summarize your resume, it is to prove your thesis and highlight your writing abilities. Your cover letter and resume should support each other and be in sync.

The introductory paragraph should do just enough to catch the reader's eye and be a good platform to launch into your other "substance" paragraphs. In the middle paragraphs, be concise and write clearly without distracting the reader with too many random thoughts. Your concluding paragraph should restate your thesis and tells the reader that you just proved your thesis.

The Harris School of Public Policy at the University of Chicago seems to think that cover letters are still extremely relevant. They have a document on their website that breaks down how to write effective cover letters for a variety of positions:

<http://harrisschool.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/cdo/Effective-Cover-Letters.pdf>

Also, check out Paul Binkley's blog posts on [GovLoop](#) for even more information.

DO I NEED TO WORRY ABOUT KSAS AND ESSAYS?

We've got some good news here, as delivered by Lily Whiteman (who literally wrote the book on this stuff):



“Much to the relief of federal job applicants, federal agencies were directed by the president in 2011 to eliminate essay questions (usually called KSAs and ECQs) from job applications that are used in initial screens of applications. Therefore, most federal job opportunities no longer include these types of much reviled questions.

Nevertheless, federal agencies are still allowed to use essay questions in follow-up screens of applications...Therefore, at some point in your hunt for a federal job, you may discover a juicy opening that is attached to an application that has essay questions.”

Whiteman's book has a CD that accompanies it with a chapter called "Writing Killer Application Essays," so you can check that out, if you are so inclined.

Another careers expert, Kathryn Troutman also covers this ground in her book "Ten Steps to a Federal Job," with several tips for writing winning narratives (her tips apply specifically for KSA essays, so we're adapting for a post-KSA world):



1. Give one fantastic example that ties into the job description keywords.

2. Quantify or qualify your results / accomplishments.

3. Let the CCAR (Context-Challenge-Actions-Results) drive your story.

4. Write in the first person.

5. Proofread your essays (or have someone else do so).

Like we said, it may not come up often, but be ready to put a bit more time into these essays - the payoff will be worth it, we promise.

HOW DO I SHINE IN THE INTERVIEW?

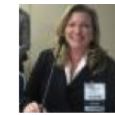
So you've made it through the first step and scored an interview for your dream position, great job! Now, how do you stand out from the other candidates? Chris Grant and Charles DeLuca, current federal employees, say to pay attention to what the job description mentions so you're prepared for an impressive interview.

"The interview had more technical questions about skills needed for the job."

"If applying for a technical job, be prepared for more specific questions."

Prepping for an interview by researching more about the agency also shows you're a well-polished applicant. Joel McFarland says he became "educated on what programs the agency ran and looked for specific data programs" that were mentioned in the job description to stand out.

One of the most important, and often forgotten, techniques for a good interview is well-polished body language. Kathleen Smith has a great [post on GovLoop](#) about the 6 essential tips for body language when interviewing that we've added here for you:



6 BODY LANGUAGE TIPS FOR INTERVIEWING

Posted by [Kathleen Smith](#) on January 29, 2013 at 5:12pm

As we mention frequently, people make snap decisions about you based on first impressions.

It's important that you present a positive total package to a potential employer. One aspect of that is body language. Many of the judgments that interviewers make about you are subconscious – they don't even realize they are judging you when they judge you. Some body language tips to keep in mind when you interview:

Have a good handshake

You want to shake the other person's hand firmly, but not too hard. This isn't a strength contest. Give it 2-3 shakes and let go. People with weak handshakes often don't realize they have a weak handshake. Practice with some friends - yes really - and get feedback. It may sound silly, but it's important. A good handshake conveys confidence and assurance.

Sit up straight

Sit up straight during your interview, and when you are seated waiting for the interviewer to arrive. A lot of office furniture today is low and slouchy. Sit on the edge of the chair or sofa, which helps you sit up straight. Leaning very slightly forward projects an interest in what the interviewer is saying.

Smile

Attitude is more important than most job seekers realize. Don't paste a frozen smile on for the entire interview, but being friendly, cordial and positive makes people want to work with you. And hire you.

Be present

Look the interviewer in the eye when they speak. Acknowledge them by nodding or otherwise affirming occasionally that you are paying attention to what they are saying. Focus, concentrate and be present in the moment.

Sit still

You may be nervous or antsy, but strive to sit still and be calm. Avoid foot tapping, fidgeting, tapping your pen, playing with your hair, clearing your throat, or whatever your nervous tic may be. You want to appear comfortable and professional, not nervous and unhappy to be there. If you're unsure of your nervous tics asks friends or colleagues.

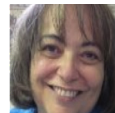
Be open

Don't cross your arms. Or your legs. Crossing your arms gives a signal that you are uncomfortable and unreceptive. Crossing your legs can make you slouch.

Many interviewers are as uncomfortable as you are. Anything you can do to help put them at ease and show that you are a confident and competent professional will help your chances of securing the position.

Taken from <http://www.govloop.com/profiles/blogs/6-body-language-tips-for-interviewing>

NASA's Doris Tirone had a few additional thoughts about the interviewing process:



One of the recommendations that I make to job seekers is that at the end of their interview, the first thing they should do is to ask several standard questions:

- *What's the next step in the process?*
- *How did this position become vacant?*
- *Who does this position report to?*
- *May I contact you in a couple weeks if I have not heard anything and, if so, who should I contact?*

Tell the hiring manager at the end: 'I really love the job. Thank you for your time today. Based on what I've heard, I'm excited about this opportunity. It sounds like it would be a great opportunity for me, but I also hope that you found my qualifications to fit what you're looking for.'

Follow-up with a nice email. If you really mean what you say, put it in writing. If the manager is on the fence, it shows the hiring manager that you have initiative, interest and enthusiasm. The applicant is in the catbird seat if they are willing to take the helm.

SALARY NEGOTIATION

With most positions, there is room for negotiation, but there's a technique to it. Don't expect to be able to jump to the upper level of the pay scale for an entry level job, but don't be satisfied with the lowest either.

Some positions may have benefits included in the compensation package, those are valuable! These benefits can be negotiated too, but don't expect too much. There is a fine line between proper negotiation and being greedy.

SALARY NEGOTIATION TIPS



Excerpt from a great blog post on GovLoop from career expert Heather Krasna:

I think many people are afraid to ask about salary (see the excellent book “Women Don’t Ask”). This stems from insecurity that just by asking they might sour the relationship with an employer or even lose a precious job offer. However, salary negotiation is par for the course in the professional world, and if it’s done right it can add thousands to not just your starting salary, but salaries you later earn for the rest of your career. My book Jobs That Matter has numerous salary negotiation tips specific to public sector employment. Here are just a few tips that apply to many job offers.

It is not recommended to discuss salary before you receive a job offer. This is difficult because many employers will ask you for your salary requirements before or during the interview. It’s ideal to state something like “I would be glad to discuss that with you when we know we are mutually interested in working together,” or to turn around the question and ask if they have a range in mind. The reason for this is that if you state a range that is too high, you might be taken out of the running before you have a chance to prove to the employer that you are the ideal candidate; and if you state something too low, you have just lost money you could have earned. So try not to answer the question—and certainly do not be the person to bring up salary first.

One important thing to note is that, even though you have to disclose prior salaries in a federal application, the prior salary history is (from what I understand) not used to determine your future salary. Your grade is instead based on whether you meet the qualifications for the job at a particular grade level. (Note to federal HR folks: correct me if I’m wrong!).

Once you receive an offer, it is incumbent upon you to ask questions. You have to know exactly what is included in the offer, especially the salary, benefits, start date, vacation, typical working hours, dress code, etc. If you don’t know something, now is the time to ask.

1. TIMING IS EVERYTHING



2. ASK IT RIGHT



3. WHAT TO DO IF YOU CAN'T GET TO YES



Once you have the offer, the trick is also to **not** accept it on the spot. Ask for some time to think about it. Then, reply with a carefully researched response. Find out the average salaries in your field by using sites like salary.com, payscale.com, glassdoor.com, [OPM](http://OPM.gov) for federal jobs, and [Guidestar](http://Guidestar.org) for nonprofits, and (if you are a student or recent grad) by asking your college career center what the average salaries are for students with your background. Counter the offer with a number that is higher than the offered amount, but not so much higher as to be insulting, and back up your request with data about the average salaries as well as specific reasons why you deserve more.

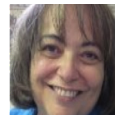
It’s possible to jeopardize an offer if you don’t make the request in the right way. You first have to always be appreciative about and excited by the offer. If you just state that you are waiting for a better-paying offer, you could lose the offer by showing you’re just not that excited by it. Instead, show enthusiasm, but temper it with some questions about salary. If you are really afraid to ask for more money, you can start by asking if the employer would mind if you ask a question about salary. The vast majority will reassure you that it is OK to ask the question.

If you have to take a lower salary, perhaps because the employer simply doesn’t have the budget to offer more, consider asking what the promotional timeline is and whether you could have an early performance review tied to a potential raise. Be sure to get this in writing.

For other tips, visit SalaryNegotiations.com. And be sure to check out GovLoop’s [Government Salary Calculator](http://GovLoop.com/GovernmentSalaryCalculator), to find out what pay to expect (or ask for) in your next position.

Original post: <http://www.govloop.com/profiles/blogs/salary-negotiation-tips>

Again, Doris Tirone of NASA had these insider tips for salary negotiation:



If you go for the lowest grade level you're willing to accept and it's lower than the one you're eligible for, you're in a position when offered the lower grade level, to negotiate a higher pay step within that grade level. For instance, even if you qualify for a GS-9, apply for the GS 7 grade level and, if offered the GS-7, negotiate for a Step 2. Here's how: if you truly qualify for the higher pay grade, defend your request – because the agency has to defend their decision too! We have all these requirements to satisfy before setting pay at a rate that's higher than the base rate ... and we're required to justify our reasons before we're able to agree. If you qualify for a GS-9, but you come in at a GS 7, negotiating to start at a Step 2 might make sense if you can justify your request with reasons like greater experience, higher education than required, etc., and I am willing to push for that. Otherwise, you could disqualify yourself from the job all together or limit your promotion potential over time. And remember, if you are unable to negotiate a higher pay rate or other requests, don't let them be a deal breaker either! Accept the job the way it was offered!

The Wagner Graduate School of Public Service at NYU also has an excellent source for how to navigate the negotiation process during the interview period and after you've received an offer:

<http://wagner.nyu.edu/careers/resources/files/SalaryNegotiationGuide.pdf>

TO CALL OR NOT TO CALL? FOLLOW-UP CONTACT WITH HIRING MANAGERS

When and how often should you call a hiring manager throughout the process? Perhaps the most comprehensive advice comes from Lily Whiteman in her book *How to Land a Top-Paying Federal Job*:



Many agencies provide applicants with updates (either by email or on password-protected websites) confirming submission of their applications, informing them whether they have been chosen as a best-qualified applicant, and then telling them after a final selection has been made...

Unfortunately, some agencies are not really conscientious about communicating with applicants during the selection process. Grrr!!

If more than three weeks have passed since your target job's closing date, call the agency contact person identified on your target jobs' announcement, and ask him or her if your application rated among the best-qualified applicants or, in government lingo, "made the cert." If not, ask how high you scored. The resulting feedback you receive may help you determine whether your application strategy's on the right track or warrants an overhaul. You may also ask whether you will be interviewed, how many applicants are competing for the job, and who the selecting official is.

Don't be shy about calling agency contacts, I have personally contacted many of them and I assure you that these staffers are generally very obliging and helpful. Keep in mind that it is their job to answer applicants' questions. You are well within your rights to consult them, and you won't alienate the hiring agency or damage your application in any way by inquiring about its status.

If more than 10 days to two weeks have elapsed since your interview, or the date your interviewer promised to make a decision has passed, call your interviewer, reaffirm your interest in the job, and politely ask when he or she expects to make a decision.

In addition to contacting agency officials after you've submitted an application or sat for an interview, careers expert Camille Roberts said that she advise clients "to try to make contact before the application deadline and find out when they expect to hire for the position" and to "ask them when they could check back with them."

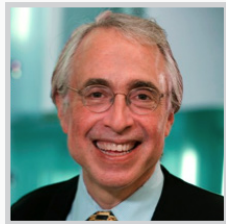
Some additional nuggets of wisdom from Whiteman include:

- **Don't leave phone messages:** "You will be rendered powerless while waiting (perhaps futilely) for a return call. Instead, keep calling without leaving messages until you reach your target hiring manager."
- **Stay in periodic touch with the interviewer:** Call or email occasionally - "but not too often...there is a fine line between getting credit for being persistent and for getting a reputation for being a persistent pest."
- **Ask for feedback if you don't get the job:** "Call your interviewer and express thanks for having been con-

DO YOU NEED ADDITIONAL ENCOURAGEMENT?

“1. **Never give up.** The federal hiring process rewards patience and persistence. Don’t be a pest, but do make sure that you keep your name in play.”

2. **Keep your eye on the mission.** Every job posting you read should have some statement about the agency’s overall mission. If there isn’t a mission statement in the posting, move on. If the mission isn’t in the description, it won’t be in the job either.”



Paul C. Light,
New York University Wagner’s Paulette
Goddard Professor of Public Service
and Robertson Foundation for Govern-
ment Advisory Board Member

sidered, mention your interest in future openings and ask for some honest feedback...for your bravery you may be rewarded with some suggestion that could help you nail your next interview.”

Current IRS employee Charles DeLuca summed it up in this way:

“Don’t get over excited. Once your application has passed through to the Agency [out of the OPM system], then you should be proactive.”

DeLuca was proactive in his search. After being passed through the OPM system, he reached out to the Directors and hiring managers to sell himself even more:

“You can distinguish yourself. Reach out to Directors and tell them about yourself. Three or four Directors actually emailed back and said they looked for my resume when reviewing.”

We received the same insider scoop from a senior human resources executive who said that the time to start making contact with a potential hiring manager is before a job is even posted. In fact, that’s the best time because they might feel limited in what they can do once a position is posted. If you can pinpoint an agency or unit within an agency, start getting in touch with the leadership now.

If you decide to reach out to a hiring manager, make sure you are persistent, but not an annoyance. Also, don’t forget about contacts you may have made during your internships or previous jobs. The recently hired government employees that we interviewed for this guide reached out to their contacts within agencies and learned that people can’t pull you through the system, but it certainly helps to reach out! Speaking of that, let’s talk a bit about networking, shall we?

PROACTIVE CONNECTION BUILDING

Donna Dyer, Director of Career Services at Duke’s Sanford School, says that she directs her students to be creative and proactive in building a professional network in government:



“Use your personal networks to improve your application, like people you know in that agency, alumni connections, friends of friends, parent’s friends – your personal network in that agency

– to help you prepare an application that is the best it can be. Go meet everyone you can in government. It’s not like you can just call the hiring manager, but the more knowledge you have of the organization by talking to people who have been hired, the better you can prepare your application.”

Careers expert Camille Roberts would say the same:



“Don’t just network...connect. Get educated on the agency, the people in the agency. Find out who works there and ask for an informational interview. Join GovLoop and participate in the group discussions! Join LinkedIn and LinkedIn groups and participate in the group discussion.”

Brand Yourself. Understand your value and what you bring to the job...then demonstrate it via the cover letter, résumé, USAJOBS résumé builder, and social media.”

So how do you connect with the right kind of people? Below are a few specific ways we’d recommend:

MENTORS PROGRAMS

Having a mentor is invaluable to your professional aspirations and also provides an outlet for questions that you are uncomfortable asking in your workplace, especially in the federal government sector where structured career development opportunities are not always readily available. Strong mentoring relationships provide an opportunity for both parties to learn from each other through a caring and respectful partnership.

That’s one of the reasons why we created the [GovLoop Mentors Program](#) -- a first-of-its-kind, government-wide initiative that connects public sector professionals across agencies and at every level (Federal, state and local) of government. Our program is free and responds to the unprecedented need for effective knowledge transfer and leadership development throughout government. We’ve had several students participate in the program and it helped them to connect with and learn from agency leaders. To learn more about how you can participate in the Mentors program, visit [mentors.gov-loop.com](#).

In addition, you might consider the following opportunities as well:

- Professional associations like Blacks in Government, Federally Employed Women, Senior Executives Association, Young Government Leaders and similar
- Voyager Program, American Council for Technology-Industry Advisory Council
- Partnership for Public Service Program(s)

SOCIAL MEDIA

You are likely on LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and a couple other social networks (ahem, like GovLoop!) and you might be wondering how you can leverage them to advance your government career. We actually [hosted a webinar](#) on this very topic and turned it into a blog post. The “Cliff Notes” version of that webinar is below:



30 WAYS TO USE SOCIAL MEDIA AND ADVANCE YOUR GOVERNMENT CAREER

By Andrew Krzmarzick, GovLoop Community Manager

How do you leverage Facebook, GovLoop, LinkedIn, Twitter and Google to advance your career? Below are more than 30 tips to help you leverage social media successfully:

FACEBOOK

1. What happens on Facebook does not stay on Facebook: potential employers are searching for you online. What do you find in your profile and what will they think?
2. Fix your pics: You might want to delete the photos that will leave a lasting (and not-so-flattering) impression.
3. Protect your privacy. Facebook has solid privacy settings that you’ll want to research and use to update the content that others can see publicly.
4. Be strategic with lists. One way to protect your content is to share it only to people on specific lists (and not beyond that list).

5. Don’t take it personal. Have you heard of BranchOut? It’s an app designed to bridge your personal and professional existence on Facebook. Check it out.

GOVLOOP

1. [Find colleagues](#) doing similar work.
2. Become recognized as an expert in your field by [writing a blog](#) or [responding to questions](#).
3. Get smarter by reading [guides](#) and [infographics](#).
4. Use the curated search tools at [Jobs.GovLoop](#).
5. Sign up to participate in the [GovLoop Mentors Program](#).
6. Check out resume tips in our [Rock Your Resume](#) group.
7. Attend [online](#) and [in-person](#) training.

LINKEDIN

1. Update your profile. There’s nothing worse than a recruiter or hiring manager arriving at your profile and finding very little information.
2. Connect weekly to expand your network. Try to wander over there and post a couple links to what you’re reading. Look for and link to new people based on LinkedIn’s automatic suggestions.
3. Give details when you invite colleagues to connect. When you invite someone to connect, be sure to include a personal note or some additional identifying information.
4. Leverage groups to stay attuned to people in your field. Post content, respond to questions and be helpful in groups. It’s just one way to stand out in a targeted crowd.
5. Recommend your colleagues regularly (and request them for yourself). Do unto others as you would have done for you. Even doing one or two of these a month builds good karma.



6. Integrate with blogs, Twitter, etc. If you don't have your LinkedIn account connected to other social sites, consider making your life easy by replicating your content quickly.



TWITTER

1. Tweet like an expert. Share information that is valuable to people following, maybe even with a quick commentary on it.
2. Use Twitter hashtags. Get your information farther, faster.
3. Connect with recruiters and employers. Try retweeting their content regularly and watch how quickly they'll start to appreciate you.
4. Build a relevant network. Look at who follows people you follow that are influential to you and your field. Follow them and they will likely follow you back.
5. RT regularly. I covered this in number three with a specific target group. Do it as a matter of course. People are often flattered that you found their tweet important enough to share.
6. Leverage lists. This might be the very best way to quickly follow a bunch of relevant people at once.
7. Listen and learn. Maybe you still refuse to join Twitter. That's fine. Use Twitter search on topics that are important to you and see what people are sharing in your field.

you're consuming across the web, which saves you valuable time and filters the best information fast.

4. Talk "face to face" with Google+ Hangout. Do you want to conduct an informational interview, but don't live in the same place? Meet them "in-person" through a free video chat.

INTERNAL NETWORKS (LIKE YAMMER, CHATTER OR MAX.GOV)

1. Yes, you should use them. You can't win if you don't participate.
2. Be helpful when you're there. Answer questions. Become the go-to guru,
3. Position yourself as a thought leader. Share what you learn from other agencies or journals like Harvard Business Review. You'll look like someone who knows what they're talking about.
4. Interact with senior leaders. How else are you going to get access to the upper echelon? You can't get invited to the big meeting, but you can connect via an online portal.
5. Strive for balance. You don't want people wondering how you get your day job done (or see that it starts to suffer because of your activity).



GOOGLE

1. Search yourself. Know what recruiters and hiring managers are finding when they search on you after seeing your resume come across their desks. You know this is the first thing they're doing.
2. Set up alerts. Google Alerts automates the process described under "Search Yourself." Find out what about you is appearing online in real-time.
3. Get a reader to get organized. Google Reader organizes all the stuff

THE ART AND SCIENCE OF NETWORKING



by Michael Schneider, Director of the Washington Public Policy Program at Syracuse University's Maxwell School of Public Policy and Career Development Advisory for RFFG

Networking is a fundamental element of prospecting for jobs and for success in the workplace. One builds relationships through networking, acquires information about people, organizations and issues, and is better able to make constructive, self-supportive decisions.

Networking is reflected in the many terms we use to express the concept: job-hunting, making contact, outreach, informational interview, introduction, information gathering, 'scoping out', intelligence gathering, 'getting the low-down', triangulating, comparing notes, gossiping, 'schmoozing', etc.

For some who are naturally gregarious or outgoing mingling with others is easy in all kinds of settings. Some people find it difficult to make 'small talk' but are quite relaxed (relieved?) about 'talking shop.'

As a preliminary step to gaining networking skills, you might inventory your own talents and interests, preferences, proclivities, inhibitions, likes and dislikes about communicating with others.



THE SCIENCE

Self-Assessment: Know your self, your strengths and weaknesses.

Career Aspirations: Identify your major and two minors – functionally, geographically. Define yourself by program, policy or research – and what mix. It's often a matrix. Know what's what and who's who in your targeted fields

How to get from here to there: Find the right sources of information - who do you know in each field – fellow grads, friends, family and family friends, academic and other teachers, supervisors, possible mentors. Map out the time frame for job search and fulfilling a job assignment.

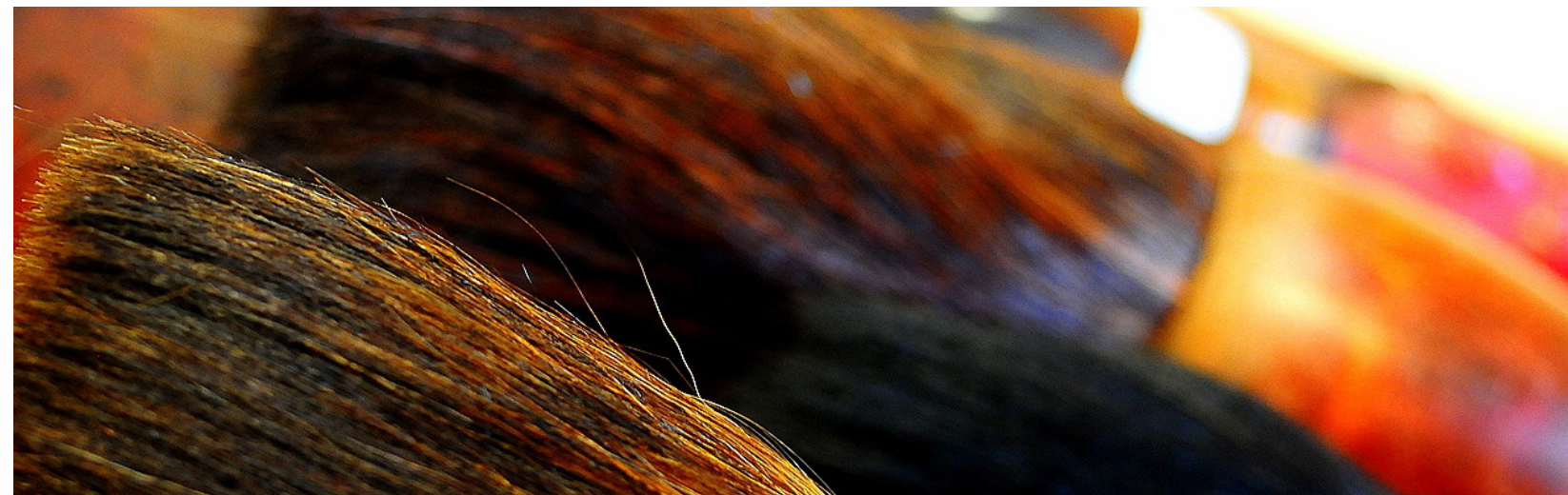
THE ART

Come prepared – do your homework: Who is the other person? What will the meeting be about? Who will be at the party, what is it likely to be like – strictly chilling out and fun, no work? Semi-work related, office party...?

Develop the art (and necessity) of asking questions: Think about getting at who the other person is, likes and dislikes, commonalities, shared tastes, interests, friends, six degrees of separation, mutual experiences, etc.. Figure out a way to remember the other person. Is there a way you can help them and they might help you?

Ask yourself: do you like them? Would you be interested in seeing them again or doing something with them, whether there's any 'utility' or not? Does your significant other share the same view [not necessary but smooths the way.]

Protect your privacy: Do you have answers for others questions and probing that protect your sense of privacy (whether heightened or not) yet keeps the relationship alive?



INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

Informational interviews are great for numerous reasons. They allow you to learn more about a new organization or field of work, understand different roles in a new organization, or when you're seeking to move up within your current organization. For high achievers like yourself, an informational interview can produce many benefits: getting an honest perspective on a potential career path, learning about agencies that you may work with, hearing about careers paths to a position you aspire to, and for basic networking and making new contacts.

When you're wanting to conduct an informational interview, don't be afraid to ask someone. People, especially those in the government, like helping people out. Make sure you do your research prior to heading to the interview by looking on LinkedIn and Google. Doing this will make the interview flow much smoother. Many people are pretty busy, so be sure to give options as to when and where you'd like to meet. Maybe offer lunch, coffee, or beer, but never forget about classic phone interview.

After you've set up an interview come up with questions you'd like answered. Engage in small talk for a while and then get to the reason you're at the interview: to learn. Lastly, make sure you follow up the interview. A simple thank you email or note is great and goes a long way toward establishing a healthy connection.

One of the best ways to learn more about agency opportunities is by interviewing people who work in those agencies. Plus, who knows? Maybe they know about opportunities coming available and can point you to someone or put in a good word for you if they know you well enough to serve as a reference.

Below is a blog post that gives you five solid tips for how to ace the informational interview.



TOP 5 – TIPS FOR AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

by Steve Ressler, GovLoop Founder and President

About three years ago, I conducted an extensive job search. As part of that job search, I held probably 40 information interviews. Well, now life reverses its course and I've been helping folks out recently as I've been the interviewee on the information interview.

As such, here's my top 5 tips on how to conduct an informational interview:

1) Don't be afraid and just ask: Most people fail to conduct successful informational interviews because they never ask anyone. People like helping others out, especially if the ask is clear (and it's always a little flattering).

2) Do your research: It sounds simple, but if you ask for an informational interview, value that person's time. Spend at least an hour on Google before checking out that person's LinkedIn profile, friends in common, and articles they've written or been written about. You'd be surprised how many people skip this step.

3) Give a few options: People are busy, so give them a few options – lunch, coffee, beer. Also sometimes in person can be too tough, so give phone as an option. Every person has a preferred mode of communication and let the interviewee decide.

4) Have questions: There is nothing more awkward when you get to an information interview and the interviewer has no questions. Yes, some small talk is good for awhile. But why are we here? What do you want to learn? How can I help? Come prepared with clear questions and clear asks.

5) Follow-up: After an informational interview, it is so important to follow-up. And, yes, a thank you is nice. But I really mean follow-up on your discussion. Perhaps I've offered to introduce you to a few people - remind me. If you get a job in a few months, write me a note and tell me what happened.

To see the comments on this blog post or to ask a question of the author, please go to:

<http://www.govloop.com/profiles/blogs/top-5-tips-on-informational>

Another great resource to check out is a blog series entitled "[Thinking Strategically About Your Network: The Informational Interview](#)"

NEXT GENERATION OF GOVERNMENT TRAINING SUMMIT

Attend a conference where current government leaders will be attending. You'll stand out from the crowd and build your personal network. Many events cost money, but check out the student rates that most provide. GovLoop and Young Government Leaders host a Next Generation of Government Summit (Next-Gen) that is the leading event for 600+ generation X / Y government leaders. Learn more about this year's Next-Gen Summit, July 25-26, 2013, on the [website](#).



by one of GovLoop's former Graduate Fellows Lindsey Tepe. She covers everything from learning more about a new organization or field of work to understanding yours and others' roles when you start at a new organization and seeking to move up within an organization. Informational interviews are essential to your success.

IT'S WHO YOU KNOW: LEVERAGING ALUMNI GROUPS

Of course, you will definitely want to tap into your school's alumni network. It's likely that you can gain some solid connections to people in key positions just by calling your alma mater. In fact, one current agency program analyst says that "to a new graduate who is seeking federal employment, I would point them to their school. I have found out that my university had so many networks that I could use for initial job hunt."

Many schools also offer capstone projects during a student's last semester that place them in organizations where alumni are located. Harvard Kennedy's Yulia Vershinina says that:



"Capstone projects are great in getting practical experience with the federal government. We are fortunate that Policy Analysis Exercise is required for our public policy program. These types of opportunities allow students to get experience in working directly with agencies. The exposure gives them contacts and networks that internships may not be able to do."

Joel McFarland, another recent graduate who successfully landed a government gig, backed up this notion, saying he expanded his network by connecting with "current students and alumni of his graduate school."

In addition to the people who graduated from those schools, don't forget about your school's career resources. Many schools, particularly those within the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA), have reciprocal agreements to assist students looking for jobs in other locations not near their university. Did you go to school in California but want to work in Washington, D.C.? Check to see if your school has any agreements with universities in D.C. where you could get valuable resources from a local institution. You paid for your education, don't hesitate to utilize it!

If you liked this last section, then you can find a whole lot more of the same types of tips and tricks in GovLoop's more comprehensive government career guide titled, "How to Find, Land, Keep and Leap in a Government Career" at:

<http://www.govloop.com/profiles/blogs/govloop-guide-how-to-find-land-keep-leap-your-government-career>

Once you get that government job, please let us know. Drop a line to Andrew@GovLoop.com and tell us your story. We can't wait to see how you'll make your mark on the public sector.



"How to Find, Land, Keep and Leap in a Government Career" - GovLoop's comprehensive career guide, packed with even more insider tips.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A project like this guide always involves a bunch of people. Again, this project would not have happened without the generous support of the Robertson Foundation for Government and their tireless commitment to helping people get into government. In addition to the folks we cited right up front as providing invaluable insight and insider information, you might want to meet this guide's authors:

Bo Kemper is Robertson Foundation for Government's Executive Director. Bo has served as the shepherd for this guide – developing and championing the idea of the guide across the foundation, Robertson's partner schools and their fellows. His passion for public service is contagious, complimented with great insight on making the biggest impact for people trying to break into government.

Andrew Krzmarzick, GovLoop's Community Manager, served as the overall editor and wrote quite a bit throughout the document (especially that first section where we walked you through USAJOBS). He's been writing and speaking about government careers for the last several years, and finally put all the resources in one place for audiences and readers.

Bryce Bender, GovLoop Spring 2013 Graduate Fellow, conducted the lion's share of the interviews, transcribed them and turned it all into beautiful prose. The best part is that he's been looking for a public sector opportunity as a graduate student in George Washington University's Trachtenberg School of Public Policy -- so he's both author and target audience.

Steve Ressler is GovLoop's Founder and President. As a former fed who entered through a fellowship program, he knows the ins and outs of the getting into government maze. He's got dozens blogs on the subject and is hand-picking opportunities on Jobs.GovLoop every week. We couldn't have done this guide without his edits and excerpts.

Jeff Ribeira is GovLoop's Senior Interactive Designer and all-around tech-guy-in-residence. He, along with the support of GovLoop's Spring 2013 Design Fellow, Carrie Moeger, produced this guide's layout and design.

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DECIPHER

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DELIVER

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734 15th St NW, Suite 500
Washington, DC 20005
Phone: (202) 407-7421
Fax: (202) 407-7501