GETTING INTO
Government
A Guide for High Achievers
Getting into Government
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.

http://rffg.org/

The foundation partnered with GovLoop, the leading knowledge network for government that connects and advances the careers of more than 200,000 public sector professionals, to prepare this guide. Through blogs, discussions, research guides, in-person events and online training, GovLoop connects government to improve government.
INTRODUCTION

You work hard in school, in your extracurriculars, and at your job. You never pass up an opportunity to meet new people and learn more. You have big dreams. You're a high achiever, and now you want to land the perfect government job. You have come to the right place!

This guide is all about getting into government. It provides you with the resources, tips, and even a few tricks to navigate the maze of public service jobs. We'll help you find and get the government job of your dreams.

To inform our research, we interviewed and surveyed current government interns, federal agency hiring managers and college career counselors to get their tips on how to break through the barriers and land your first government gig. We also extracted some great advice from other government career-related books out there.

Specifically, we would like to thank the following individuals who provided critical insight for this report:

Aileen Axtmayer, Associate Director of Career Services, The Fletcher School, Tufts University
Stephanie Boomhower, Assistant Director of Career Services, School of Global Policy and Strategy, University of California, San Diego
Donna Dyer, Assistant Dean for Career and Professional Development, Sanford School of Public Policy, Duke University
Chris Grant, International Economist, Office of South and Southeast Asia, U.S. Treasury Department
Bryan Kempton, Director, Office of Career Services and Alumni Relations, University of Maryland School of Public Policy
Heather Krasna, Assistant Dean, Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University
Paul C. Light, Paulette Goddard Professor of Public Service, Wagner Graduate School of Public Service, New York University
Sharon McCoy, Press Assistant, Department of Homeland Security Office of Public Affairs
Joel McFarland, Management and Program Analyst, Department of Education
Jacqueline Page, Assistant Research Fellow, Center for Complex Operations, National Defense University
Camille Roberts, Author, Federal Career Expert, and Coach, CC Career Services
Michael Schneider, Director of Washington Public Diplomacy Program, Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, at Syracuse University
Doris Tirone, Human Resources Specialist, NASA Glenn Research Center
Kathryn Troutman, Founder and President, The Resume Place, and author of “Federal Resume Guide Book”
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 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 will get your proverbial foot in the door with enough of a wedge to kick it open and get into government.
### DISCOVER:

#### HOW DO I FIND GOVERNMENT CAREER OPPORTUNITIES?

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### DECIPHER:

#### HOW DO I UNDERSTAND THE GOVERNMENT HIRING PROCESS?

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<td>Using USAJOBS</td>
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DELIBER:

HOW DO I CUT THROUGH THE CROWDED FIELD OF CANDIDATES?

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HOW DO I FIND GOVERNMENT CAREER OPPORTUNITIES?

Where do you find government work? What types of opportunities are out there – from jobs to fellowships, internships to volunteer possibilities? This section will provide a comprehensive answer to those questions.

Of course, the answers depend on the level of government where you are trying to make a difference. At the bottom of this page, we listed a few websites that are helpful resources for finding jobs across different levels of government.

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 is 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 careers. That being said, we encourage you to apply many of these same principles 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 in innovation and change-making.

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

Now let's get to the tips for getting a government job, starting with the largest collection of federal public sector jobs: USAJOBS.

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
If we had to give you some advice on 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 just go ahead and take care of this part now. If you don’t, you will go down the Advanced Search road with us, then have to redo your work with an account later. Take a few minutes and come back. We’ll wait.

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.

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. Next, we’ll talk you through each section.

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Donna Dyer
Assistant Dean for Career and Professional Development, Sanford School of Public Policy, Duke University

We encourage our students to use keywords generously. Don’t apply for a federal job that doesn’t fit your qualifications. Use USAJOBS’ powerful search engine in a way that makes sure you are not finding jobs for which you will not be fully and completely qualified.”
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 in the “Search for” space. Just pick one phrase at a time so that you can save separate searches (more on that below).

Then consider filling in the “Search by Job Title” slot. 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.

But before you go ahead and pick a title, you might want to consider what Doris Tirone, Human Resources Specialist at 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 roles, 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.”

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

OCCUPATIONAL NUMBER OR JOB NUMBER

The Occupational Series in government is so complicated that 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.

Luckily, the newest version of USAJOBS offers a side-by-side search of series number and occupation, but you’ll want a better understanding of each title before you start filtering your online job opening results. 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 specific niche in government. The key here is to narrow down the opportunities and focus your search.

Michael Schneider, Director of the Washington Public Diplomacy 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.
You might want government to “Show me the money!” and enter a high 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 also encourage you to check out our nifty Government Salary Calculator.

The 2015 General Schedule is below - many locations also have an additional locality payment to reflect a higher cost of living (for example, the DC metro area has locality payment of an extra 24.22% on top of wages). Below is the basic chart:

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<td>66,616</td>
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<td>68,088</td>
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The General Schedule covers most agencies, but 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 the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB), Federal Housing Finance Agency (FHFA), and Office of the Comptroller of the Currency (OCC) each set their own pay system.

**LOCATION**

This one is pretty straightforward, right? Actually, there are a few pearls of wisdom we can offer on how to get a job where you want to live. If you aren't picky about where you work, consider starting with locations that are likely to have more federal jobs. No suprise, the DC metro area (DC, Maryland, Virginia) usually has the highest number of jobs. However, populous states like California and Texas also usually have a significant number of vacancies, too. But keep in mind, that's just where jobs are 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 Arlington 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 graduate school who wanted to work at the State Department or the U.S. Agency for International Development (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 June 2013, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) shows that:

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

Of course, if you have a strong desire to work at 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, 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 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 of the Office of Career Services and Alumni Relations at 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

There are a vast number of series for federal jobs. The good news is that Advanced Search makes it easy for you to truncate your options once you know where you fit.
POSTING OPTIONS

This asks if you want to exclude postings for jobs open longer than 30 days. Just leave this at “no”. Most of the jobs where you even have a chance of selection 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.

WHO MAY APPLY?

This section asks if you have any experiences or attributes that qualify you for specific preference or non-competitive appointment. This is pre-set to “no” but double-check that you don’t fall into any of the categories. Heather Krasna of Columbia University said this is critical:

“I have found that for those who have non-competitive eligibility, like Returned Peace Corps Volunteers, they often don’t know how to use USAJOBS to find positions that take advantage of this eligibility. It’s very simple. Do the Advanced Search and scroll to the end of the page, then select “yes” under “Who may Apply?” Just by doing this, you can nearly double the number of posted positions you are able to apply for, and the openings are categorized differently, in a way which allows a student to have a better chance of consideration.”

There are a few other boxes to check here 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

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. On the left sidebar of the search results page, you will find the “Save This Search” button.

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 so we recommend setting 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:

![Save this search](image)

Give your search 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 inbox. Depending on how quickly you want to break into government, you can adjust how often you get updates. Federal careers expert Camille Roberts recommended setting it for daily, especially at the beginning of your search, 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.

Then, hone your search. “After you see what is available for a week or two, refine your search a bit more based on other criteria. Study Saved Searches,” Roberts said. “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 to 30 keywords in a string. After setting up the first Saved Search mentioned above and getting familiar with job announcements, set up five 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.

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**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.

What does “Excepted Service” mean? Here’s an explanation:

- 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 for 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 the federal government uses to allow 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](#).
Recognizing the importance of filtering out 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, Best Places to Work, and GovLoop information to provide a new approach to searching for federal jobs (just like Kayak and Expedia provide new ways to search for flights).

Let's walk 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 categories for entry level and $100K+ (we know you want to swing for the fences right from the start).

You can click on these categories and be taken immediately to a page where we've 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**.
5. Select jobs by whether they have **multiple vacancies** (pro tip: you just upped your chances) and **salary**.
6. Filter by eligibilty to see if the job is for all **U.S. citizens** or **Status Candidates** (current federal employees).

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 weekly emails in which we pick the top 10 most interesting jobs in each of 11 different fields. 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:
of openings are for current fed. 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.)

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 advisers and HR officials have said that just as often these are real openings with quick turnarounds.

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

have multiple vacancies. We always encourage folks to especially look at these job openings as these are agencies motivated to quickly hire, which increases your odds.

We talk more about multiple vacancies and some of the other nuances around federal job descriptions below. Suffice 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 at a particular agency, you might be open to others if they are 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.
- 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**. 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.
Most new graduates want to work at an agency that has a global scope and impact. The default agencies for these job seekers seem to be the State Department and USAID. What you may not know is that there are at least 45 other agencies or subcomponents with an international facet.

In fact, some of the agencies listed here might offer a better chance of getting into government as there are likely fewer applicants for open opportunities. Moreover, one of these might 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 U.S. Department of Transportation has an Aviation and International Affairs component.

In addition to these agencies, be sure to consider specific foreign service programs at individual agencies. State runs the largest program, but did you know there is also a Foreign Agricultural Service, a Commercial Foreign Service, and even a USAID Foreign Service?

For more information on finding an international job in public service, check out our dedicated guide, Making Global Impact: Guide to International Jobs in Government, also published with the Robertson Foundation.

That should get you started, 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, you might want to get foreign experience on your resume in other ways first. From teaching in Department of Defense Education Activity (DODEA) schools to volunteering in nonprofits or non-governmental organizations or even serving at a military exchange, the three resources below help you think about other viable avenues to get some international experience.

- Military Exchanges Information
- State Department - Working Overseas
- International Educational Exchange Program
Since working at an agency with a global scope is so popular, we 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 suggested earlier.
- 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 jobs have “Multiple Locations.” If so:
  - 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 U.S., 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 out a bit too much.

- 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
- Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, State Department
- Central Intelligence Agency
- Citizenship and Immigration Services Bureau
- Coast Guard
- Commission on International Religious Freedom
- Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe
- Department of Defense
- Environmental Protection Agency, International Cooperation
- Foreign Agricultural Service
- Department of Homeland Security
- Import-Export Bank
- International Affairs Office, Department of the Treasury
- International Affairs Office, Department of the Interior
- International Broadcasting Bureau
- International Affairs Office, Department of Education
- 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
- Overseas Private Investment Corporation
- Peace Corps
- Policy and International Affairs Office, U.S. Patent and Trademark Office
- Office of Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, State Department
- 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
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 it actively recruits people from all backgrounds. It needs diverse skill sets from recent graduates, former military members, and professionals in career transition. Yulia Vershinina of Harvard University says:

“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 more than 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 that can you be officially hired. Realizing this can save you headaches in the future; apply early so that the clearance process doesn’t diminish your job hunting.

To apply, you can search on USAJOBS.gov. Start by using “intelligence” as a search term, then narrow your search by looking 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 some websites and resources that make the process flow faster and give you access to more information:

- IntelligenceCareers.gov represents the 17 agencies listed above and give information about the application process.
- Intelligence Community Student Opportunities Virtual Info Session is a free, annual, online career fair that allows you to learn about available intelligence jobs, interact with recruiters, and learn how to apply for positions.

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 2014 Clearance Jobs Security Clearance Compensation Survey:

Earnings for professionals with an active federal security clearance decreased by a little less than 1 percent since the 2013 ClearanceJobs Compensation Report, which reported an average total compensation of $88,447. Now, the average base pay for cleared workers is $74,391, with additional compensation in the form of overtime, danger pay and bonuses contributing another $14,032.
Are you special? Of course you are. Donna Dyer, Assistant Dean at Duke University’s Sanford School of Public Policy said, “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, “Pathways allows for an individual who has little to no federal career experience to 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.”

Pathways offers entry points to federal internships for students from high school through post-graduate school as well as recent graduates. It provides invaluable training and career development opportunities for those trying to enter government. Some positions are paid and some are voluntary. There are three programs under Pathways: the President Management Fellows (PMF) 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 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 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 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.

“The application process is competitive - about 1 in 10 applicants become finalists. However, as one former PMF finalist notes, ‘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.’”

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

Do pursue multiple doors for coming into the federal government. There are a number of entry options, including USAJOBS, the Presidential Management Fellows program, serving in the administration, and internships that can be converted into permanent positions. There are also different noncompetitive options, including prior volunteer service in the Peace Corps, and excepted service hiring authorities, that you can take advantage of if you qualify. Apply for as many of these as you can because you honestly do not know which of these doors will be the one that opens.”

**Sharon McCoy**  
Press Assistant, Department of Homeland Security Office of Public Affairs
Below are some statistics from the Class of 2014:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Applicants</th>
<th>Finalists</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>8,700</td>
<td>869</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>9,102</td>
<td>850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>9,100</td>
<td>628</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>12,120</td>
<td>633</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>7,800</td>
<td>518</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PMF SELECTIONS 2010-2014
(as of 10/20/15)

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 left.

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 one and can still apply to federal positions outside the PMF program on USAJOBS.

Michael Schneider at the Maxwell School at Syracuse University 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:

- A minimum of 160 hours of formal classroom training (80/year).
- Completing at least one developmental assignment four to six months in length.
- Creating a performance plan and undergoing an annual performance review.
- Passing the Annual Review.
- Creating an individual development plan used to set goals for your time in the program.
- Engaging in optional rotational opportunities with other offices or agencies.
- Receiving 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 PathstoPMF.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 advisers and agency PMF coordinators. Of course, the official information can be found at PMF.gov.
INTERNSHIP PROGRAMS

The Pathways Internship Program replaced the former Student Career Experience Program and Student Temporary Employment Program. The internship programs give students from high school to graduate school 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 at a federal agency and still be a student, this is the program for you.

What’s great about the internship program is that the positions are either paid or unpaid, 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 he made during his internship when looking for a full-time job.

As with most federal positions, there are some eligibility requirements. For this program, you must be a current student in an eligible institution, which includes:

- High school, college (four-year colleges/universities, community colleges, and junior colleges).
- Professional, technical, vocational, and trade schools.
- 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:

- Complete at least 640 hours of work experience 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.

We can’t stress enough that this may be your best shot at getting into government with less experience than other candidates. Toni Harris Quinerly, the former Director of Career Services at NYU’s Wagner School, said that many times internships 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.”

Securing an internship is vital, especially if you have limited knowledge and work experience. An internship related to the type of work that you want to do is critical to develop the skills you already possess, or to develop skills that you’re going to need to be successful in your career field.”

Matthew Upton
PhD, Assistant Dean, Career and Student Services, Bush School of Government and Public Service, Texas A&M University

Although 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’s unpaid internships, but most often they are 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.
Take a deeper look at the agency websites to identify special fellowships and other programs that allow you to get some experience in the field, even if it's not permanent experience. Some of the fellowship programs are hard to find and not listed on USAJOBS, so it's ideal to identify your favorite agencies via a site like USA.gov and then dig into their websites and search for opportunities. In addition, one of the easier ways to get into a federal career is to look for internship programs that can transition to full-time jobs. There are also certain excepted service possibilities for students who have disabilities (Schedule A).

Heather Krasna
Assistant Dean, Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University

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 two years, unless you are veteran, in which case you might 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 have:

- Completed your degree (associate, bachelor’s, master’s, professional, doctoral, vocational or technical degree or certificate) in the previous two years.
- Been a veteran within the past six years and cannot meet the two-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 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!

A current Pathways intern highlighted 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 a consistent, fixed position.”

Former intern Dorothy Amatucci had a similar assessment of her experience. “Pathways has been great for me because the program is so flexible,” she said. “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.”

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, do an advanced search on USAJOBS (noticing a trend?) for “recent graduate” and you’ll get a large list. Be aware of the 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 six 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 expand their experience! Here's a list of some (but not all) of the most interesting fellows programs:
**Department of Homeland Security “Secretary’s Honors Program”**

The Secretary’s Honors Program 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. Selected fellows may 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 offers fellowships annually to three outstanding undergraduates from across the nation, chosen from students serving in a summer professional position with the U.S. Department of State in Washington, DC, and the U.S. Embassies in London and Paris.

**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.

**Virtual Student Foreign Service**

The program, founded in 2009, offers U.S. college students the opportunity to work remotely as eInterns for one of 15 federal agencies, including NASA, NIH, Commerce, and more. A VSFS eInternship is an opportunity to build a relationship with U.S. diplomatic posts abroad and federal domestic offices to work on various projects to advance our nation’s diplomatic and developmental goals. E-Interns are expected to dedicate approximately 10 hours per week through the academic year and the position is unpaid.

**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 firsthand 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 more federal fellowships on USAJOBS.gov by doing an advanced search for “Fellowship.” Experience.com also offers a great list of fellowships and GovLoop provides a full list of local, state and federal hiring programs.
DIRECT-HIRE AUTHORITY

We wanted to quickly touch on other direct hiring authorities. As Charles DeLuca, an International Economist at the U.S. Treasury Department, 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 OPM 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 positions that might be more applicable to the broader population, such as:

- Positions involved in post-conflict reconstruction efforts (often requires fluency in Arabic or related language).
- Positions in federal acquisition.
- Information technology management (information security).
- Medical occupations.

Where can you find a full list of current governmentwide DHAs? OPM provides a convenient list of current positions here. In this section, we highlight some common DHAs 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 past three years), AND
- separated under honorable conditions (this means an honorable or general discharge).

You must provide documentation of your preference/appointment eligibility. To see a full list of requirements and forms, visit 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, flexible schedules and sites (ex: teleworking), and adaptable technology and equipment.

For a full overview of the accommodations made for persons with disabilities, reference OPM's page on [Disability Employment](https://www.opm.gov/healthy-workforce/disability/).

**MINORITIES**

OPM has sustained efforts to create a more diverse federal workforce as a model of equality, diversity, and inclusion. OPM has issued governmentwide inclusion and diversity strategies, which focus on diversity, workplace inclusion, and sustainability. Recently, the OPM has reported that minorities account for 34.1 percent of the total workforce.

OPM also renewed the Hispanic Council on Federal Employment 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 earlier fellowships section to see a full list of opportunities. Also, be sure to check if the agency you are looking at has any Executive Order hiring practices established.

**WHERE TO GET EXPERIENCE**

Get Experience with the public sector via consulting, contracting or a nonprofit: 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](https://www.vault.com/consulting), 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 nonprofits, 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](https://www.idealista.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.
Getting into Government

Decipher
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, 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.

**USING USAJOBS**

**1. Job Title**

There are myriad job titles on USAJOBS but you'll also see a few that pop up over and over again to describe standard, entry-level roles. GovLoop Founder Steve Ressler described a few of them:

- **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 plan agencies and execute their budgets. 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 away from paper and toward more of a strategic talent management field. 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.
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 10 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, 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, Tirone 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 period of at least five business days, but the requirement is simply to allow for an 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."

Aileen Axtmayer, Associate Director of Career Services at Tufts University, also said not to be put off if the announcement says only a certain number of early applicants will be considered:

"If students are qualified they should apply even if they don't think that they will be the first 'X' number of applicants. Some Pathways internships/full-time jobs open and say they are only open for a certain amount of time, or to the first few applicants. There is actually not a system in place within USAJOBS to close an application when the first few applicants have applied. They're always open for at least 24 hours. So, if a student applies, even if they didn't make it within the first 'X' number, their application still legally has to be reviewed because it was received by the system in the open application window. It's a great loophole to not miss out on good opportunities!"

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. But 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 a simple break down:

- **Series**: This is the occupational code we were talking about earlier. 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**: This is the rate of basic pay associated with a specific level of work or range of difficulty, responsibility and qualification requirements.
Step: There are 10 steps, or smaller pay bands, 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 ($40 - $55K 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, for GS-9 you'll need a master's degree, and for a GS-11 or higher you'll need a PhD without prior experience. 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 an earlier text box. 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.

6. Promotion

Do you want to know what your career path will look like in a given job? “Promotion” is where you find out. If the position you’re looking at shows a range of GS levels, that’s one way to know that advancement is possible. Other announcements might limit you to that grade only - you start at GS-11 and stay in GS-11 unless you get a new job.

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.

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.
- 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 a 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, check out OPM’s website.

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 and five years experience; also people with a PhD fit here

If you have a master’s degree, you’re qualified for GS-9 - BUT 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
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. If you find a job announcement with multiple duty locations, 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 left that wants only people who already work for the IRS.

Make sure you apply only for jobs that are available to U.S. citizens. About 60 percent 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

This section gives you a sense of what you’ll do in this job. Read it all carefully. Some language will be general and vague, especially for analyst positions. The part where you’ll want to take some notes is if it starts using language about the specific position. For instance, in the position to the left, 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. NASA’s Doris Tirone emphasized this point:

“So many people fail to make it through the application process simply because they don’t address the qualifications. We are required by federal statute and OPM regulations to put everything in the vacancy announcement that we will use to assess candidates. So there are sections, albeit very long ones, that actually tell you exactly what you have to have and what you must address.”
Duke University’s Donna Dyer explained 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.

“In other words, we do a lot of work in helping them to identify the dealbreakers 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 dealbreakers is the most important of the whole process.”

When looking for keywords and dealbreakers, make sure you are specific. Many job announcements will list qualifications for two or more potential GS levels. Tirone advised determining which GS level you are best experienced to apply for, and craft your resume to that level’s qualifications specifically - rather than the broad position announcement.

Another government careers expert, Camille Roberts, echoed Dyer’s advice when it comes to considering a potential position. Roberts suggested doing a quick self-assessment:

Read the qualifications very carefully. Rate your knowledge on a scale of 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 1s and 2s than 3s, 4s, or 5s, 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.
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. If you want to see the official version, be sure to review OPM’s Hiring Reform information page. If you want to hear the behind-the-scenes edition for one agency, read the vignette below that NASA’s Doris Tirone shared:

“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.

“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.

“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 [applicants] ‘basically qualify’ (i.e., they fall at least into the lowest of the qualifying categories).

“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.

“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).

“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.
“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.

“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 Tirone 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 six months. At our agency, we have a three- to five-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 10 vacancy announcements at one time and at various stages in the process. 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 10 vacancy announcements in 10 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 NYU’s Toni Harris Quinerly, who said 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.”
While we have heard stories of people submitting 100 applications (and actually getting a job), we don't 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 Jacqueline Page who landed a job with the National Defense University:

"I would say the most important thing when applying to government jobs is quality over quantity. To make it through the system in that first round, reading the job description and requirements very carefully is critical. You have to try to address (and perhaps multiple times) as many of the areas highlights in your resume; cover letter and, when applicable; knowledge, skills, and abilities assessments (KSAs)."

Government career adviser and author Paul Binkley agreed. "Do not apply to one position and stop. Apply to several at a time, if you qualify," he added.

"Don't fall into the simple math trap of '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 also said, "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 percent of the questions asked, then you should reconsider whether you should apply."

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 four 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.” We turned 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 percent of the government workforce does not work in Washington, DC. Why not work closer to home 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 other field positions. For example, a big part of USDA’s CIO office in Kansas City, MO. The U.S. 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 its 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, spend some time getting experience, and rise through the ranks.

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 the capital, so we are not discouraging you from applying to opportunities there. 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 to executive agencies. The 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, Duke’s Donna Dyer recommended these kinds of opportunities as a unique way to get into government. “The smaller, independent agencies and places like GAO and the Congressional Budget Office 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,” she said. “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 in the field of the committee. Capitol Hill legislative positions are worth a book of their own as most of the legislature staff positions are filled with recent graduates and
involve very low pay, long hours, high responsibility, and high turnover - and are 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 also try to get onto a Capitol Hill listserv, which will help in getting access to these types of jobs.

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 about available opportunities from these websites and listservs:

- Brad Traverse
- The Hill
- Tom Manatos Jobs
- Opportunities in Public Affairs
- House.gov
- Senate Employment Bulletin

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.
HOW DO I CUT THROUGH A CROWDED FIELD OF CANDIDATES?

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. Now, how do you ensure that you actually 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 can avoid if you already have your resume conveniently in a .doc or .pdf format. According to HR Specialist Doris Tirone at NASA, there a number of reasons to avoid that mistake and instead devote some time to creating a new resume in the USAJOBS tool.

First, the tool ensures you include all necessary information, like clearance levels and salaries, which may not be in your personal resume. “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,” Tirone said.

Second, some agency vacancies no longer allow you to submit a .pdf version of your resume, so you may be forced to use the resume builder anyway.

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, and use numbers to highlight your accomplishments.

Tirone also encouraged applicants to treat their resumes as if they were an interview. Read the job description, specifically the qualifications section, and use your resume to answer the questions you think a potential interviewer would ask about your experience and skills. “In reality, I'm the first person who is going to meet you and I'm meeting you on paper,” she said. “Your resume has to answer the questions I can't ask you in person.”

Don't assume the HR specialist will know you are qualified given your titles and core responsibilities. Spell out exactly what makes you qualified for every requirement of the job you're applying for.

If you do decide to create your resume outside of USAJOBS, or if you're looking to apply to a non-federal government job, keep the following tips in mind to really make your resume stand out.

1. **Master Formatting Basics**

   - Don't worry about length. Federal resumes are normally five to seven pages long.
   - 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 11 points just as well as they can at 20 points, but at 11 points 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 inch and no smaller than 0.7 inches.
     - Don't waste space saying “References available upon request.” Employers know this.
2. Keep Your Audience in Mind

- 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 three- to four-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 formats 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.
- At the end of every position description, include a line about your key accomplishments.
- 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 coursework.
- 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

- Use 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, preferably one found in the position description.
- Avoid using verbs like conduct, perform, play, prepare, administer, support, assist, and maintain. Also avoid the dreaded "responsibilities included." Those passive verbs don't give you the credit you deserve.

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The most common mistake I see is people giving an abbreviated resume - just one or two pages and very private-sector - while ignoring what is required for the specific role. When I see a single page, I know there’s no way you’re going to tell me everything I need to know.”

Doris Tirone
Human Resources Specialist, NASA Glenn Research Center
6. Be Consistent!

- Think you're done? Go back and check your entire resume for consistency of:
  - Formatting (space, font, etc.).
  - Verb tense.
  - Punctuation.
  - Date format (use month and year).
  - 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 following these tips, check out a few government resume templates before you apply. The National Archives provides several templates in its Federal Resume Guide and the Food and Drug Administration also provides a detailed template.

GovLoop's Career Booster Toolkit provides several resume examples, too.

Oh, and when you are ready to hit submit, listen to this advice from 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
- Federal Prose
- Federal Resume Writer
- Heather Krasna
- Lily Whiteman
- Resume Place
COVER LETTERS

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

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 tell the reader that you just proved your thesis.

Experts at the Harris School of Public Policy at the University of Chicago suggest that cover letters are still extremely relevant. They break down how to write effective cover letters for a variety of positions on their website.

You can also check out this GovLoop post about rocking your cover letter.

KSAS AND ESSAYS

Worried about essays or Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSAs) assessments? We’ve got some good news here, as delivered by 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 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.”

If you do face an essay, follow the advice of another career expert, Kathryn Troutman. Here are a few tips from her book “Ten Steps to a Federal Job” 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 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.
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 the agency also shows you're a well-polished applicant. Education Program Analyst 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 six essential tips for body language when interviewing that we've excerpted here for you:

**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 two to three 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, ask friends or colleagues what they've noticed.
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.

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, like ‘What’s the next step in the process?’, ‘How did this position become vacant?’, ‘Who does this position report to,’ and ‘May I contact you in a couple weeks if I have not heard anything and, if so, whom 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 the manager is on the fence, it shows the hiring manager that you have initiative, interest and enthusiasm.”

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 benefits can be negotiated too, but don’t expect too much. There is a fine line between proper negotiation and being greedy.

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, you may be able 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, it might be possible to 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 its decision too!

“An agency may be able to offer a higher pay step, if the position is a critical need position. The key requisite for successful negotiations lies in the agency’s ability to justify the critical nature of the position OR if the agency is able to demonstrate that a position has been difficult to fill and a recruitment incentive is justifiable. If higher pay isn’t an option, perhaps the agency can defend a recruitment incentive that allows for more vacation time, or payment of a one-time recruitment bonus.

“Just remember, 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 altogether 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 dealbreaker either! Accept the job the way it was offered!”

The Wagner Graduate School of Public Service at NYU also has an excellent resource on how to navigate the negotiation process during the interview period and after you’ve received an offer.
Here is an 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.

1. TIMING IS EVERYTHING

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. You grade is instead based on whether you meet the qualifications for the job at a particular grade level.

2. ASK IT RIGHT

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.

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, and Guidestar for nonprofits, and (if you are a student or recent grad) by asking your college career center what the average salaries are for employees 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 to find out what pay to expect (or ask for) in your next position.
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 job's 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 advises 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 considered, 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.”

“Don't get overexcited,” said current Treasury employee Charles DeLuca. “Once your application has passed through to the agency [out of the OPM system], then you should be proactive.”

DeLuca applied this tactic. 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,” he said.
Getting into Government

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 annoying. 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 at Duke’s Sanford Schoo directs her students to be creative and proactive in building a professional network in government, especially if they want a job in DC:

“Getting a job in federal government is messy, complicated and labor-intensive, but smart people can really make a difference. If you don't have special status and can’t get through to the interview stage, just get yourself to DC and network like crazy to get the help you need to find a job in federal service. Be prepared to accept a paid internship with a nonprofit, a short-term consultancy with an international organization or government contractor, or even work with the many temporary services in DC to support yourself while you search. DC is a city that's very dependent on networking and being in town - everyone you meet is a potential career-building contact, and rest assured that almost everyone got similar help when they arrived in town.”

National Defense University’s Jacqueline Page, agreed and offered tips for making those connections:

“No big surprise here, personal relationships and your reputation matter. Get out there. Go to conferences, introduce yourself to other attendees, to panelists - don’t be shy! This is Washington, people expect it. And, you would be very surprised at how willing people are to help if you present yourself well (remember, chances are they were once in your shoes and know what it’s like). Contact experts in your field, ask if they’d be willing to meet to discuss your area of interest and then use that meeting as a springboard to other meetings/new contacts. And the cycle repeats! You just might meet someone who knows of a job about to be posted.”

Looking for more ways to get connected? In the next section, we discuss a few specific tactics and platforms to use.

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, governmentwide initiative that connects public sector professionals across agencies and at every level 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.
In addition, you might also consider the following opportunities:

- Professional associations like Blacks in Government, Federally Employed Women, Senior Executives Association, Young Government Leaders and similar.
- The Voyager Program and the 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. Below are more than 30 tips to help you leverage social media successfully:

**Facebook**

- Keep it boss-friendly. What happens on Facebook does not stay on Facebook, and potential employers are searching for you online. Ask yourself what a future boss will think of your profile and edit accordingly.
- Fix your pics. You might want to delete the photos that will leave a lasting (and not-so-flattering) impression.
- 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.
- 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).
- Don't take it personally. Once your profile is job-ready, consider using Facebook to look for opportunities. Many local, state and even federal agencies have Facebook pages or host groups where they will list vacancies and other news.

**GovLoop**

- Find colleagues doing similar work.
- Become recognized as an expert in your field by writing a blog or responding to others' posts.
- Get smarter by reading guides and infographics.
- Use the curated search tools at Jobs.GovLoop.
- Sign up to participate in the GovLoop Mentors Program.
- Attend online and in-person trainings.
- Download the free Government Career Booster Toolkit.
LinkedIn

- Update your profile. There's nothing worse than a recruiter or hiring manager arriving at your profile to find minimal or out-of-date information.
- Connect weekly to expand your network. Try to post a couple links about what you're reading. Even better, write a quick thought piece and publish a post. Look for and link to new people based on LinkedIn's automatic suggestions.
- Skip the template. When you invite someone to connect, be sure to include a personal note or additional identifying information.
- 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.
- Recommend your colleagues regularly. Do unto others as you would have done for you. Write recommendations or endorse the skills of your peers. Even doing one or two of these a month builds good karma.
- Integrate with other outlets. If you don’t have your LinkedIn account connected to other social sites, consider making your life easier by replicating your content quickly.

Twitter

- Tweet like an expert. Share information that is valuable to people in your field, maybe even with a quick commentary to accompany it.
- Use Twitter hashtags. Get your information farther, faster.
- Connect with recruiters and employers. Try retweeting their content regularly and watch how quickly they’ll start to appreciate you.
- Build a relevant network. Look at who follows people you follow who are influential in your field. Follow them! They might even follow you back.
- Retweet regularly. We covered this earlier 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.
- Leverage lists. This might be the very best way to quickly follow a bunch of relevant people at once.
- Listen and learn. 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.

Google

- Search yourself. Know what recruiters and hiring managers are finding when they search for you online. You know this is the first thing they’re going to do after seeing your resume.
- Set up alerts. Google Alerts automates the process described under “Search Yourself.” Find out what about you is appearing online in real time.
- Make a reader to get organized. Websites like Feedly organize all the stuff you’re consuming across the web, which saves you valuable time by filtering the best information fast.
- Host a Google+ Hangout. Do you want to conduct an informational interview but don’t live in the same place? Meet “in person” through a free video chat.
Internal Networks (like Yammer, Chatter or Max.gov)

- Yes, you should use them. You can't win if you don't participate. Use these intra-office platforms to stay connected.
- Be helpful when you're there. Answer questions, even if they aren't directed toward you. Become the go-to guru.
- Position yourself as a thought leader. Share what you learn from other agencies or journals like Harvard Business Review. You'll look like someone in the know.
- Interact with senior leaders. How else are you going to get access to the upper echelon? You might not get invited to the big meeting, but you can connect via an online portal.
- Strive for balance. Stay connected but don't overdo it. You don't want people wondering how you get your day job done (or see that it starts to suffer because of your activity).
Getting into Government

The Art and Science of Networking

Written by Michael Schneider, Director of the Graduate Public Diplomacy Program at Syracuse University

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 talking shop.

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

Self-assessment: Know yourself, your strengths, and your weaknesses.

Career aspirations: Identify your major and two minors, both functionally and geographically. Define yourself by program, policy, and/or research. 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, and possible mentors? Map out the time frame for job searching and fulfilling a job assignment.

Come prepared: 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 him or her and vice versa?

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 field of work, understand different roles in a new organization, or even provide information 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 networking and making new contacts.

When you want to conduct an informational interview, don’t be afraid to ask. 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 the 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 after the interview. A simple thank you email or note is great and goes a long way toward establishing a strong 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, GovLoop Founder Steve Ressler 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 informational interviews. Well, now life reverses its course and I’ve been helping folks out recently as I’ve been the interviewee on the informational interview.

As such, here’s my top five 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 interviewed for. 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 informational interview and the interviewer has no questions. Yes, some small talk is good for a while. 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.
Another great resource to check out is a blog series titled “Thinking Strategically About Your Network: The Informational Interview” 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 your 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.

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.”

In addition to alumni, don’t forget about your school’s career resources. Many schools, particularly those within the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration, 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, DC? Check to see if your school has any agreements with universities in DC where you could get valuable resources from a local institution. You paid for your education, don’t hesitate to use 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, “How to Find, Land, Keep and Leap in a Government Career.”
Be patient and don’t get discouraged. Getting into the federal government takes time. Whether you are waiting to hear back on the results of an interview or are going through the security clearance process, it can be months between when you submit your initial application and sit down at your desk for the first time. Keep this reality in mind and plan accordingly. More importantly, don’t let the lengthy process discourage you. Serving your country through a job in the federal government is an incredible experience and though it may take time, the opportunity is worth the wait.”

Sharon McCoy  
Press Assistant, Department of Homeland Security Office of Public Affairs
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT THE ROBERTSON FOUNDATION

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.

http://rffg.org/

ABOUT GOVLOOP

GovLoop’s mission is to “connect government to improve government.” We aim to inspire public-sector professionals by serving as the knowledge network for government. GovLoop connects more than 200,000 members, fostering cross-government collaboration, solving common problems and advancing government careers. GovLoop is headquartered in Washington, DC, with a team of dedicated professionals who share a commitment to connect and improve government.

For more information about this report, please reach out to info@govloop.com.

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RESOURCES

JOB LISTS

50StateJobs.com
Brad Traverse
CareerOneStop
Careers in Government
Experience.com List of Fellowship Programs
GovLoop List of Government Hiring Programs
Government Executive List of Top 200 Federal Contractors
GovJobs.com
GovtJobs.com
The Hill
House.gov
ICMA Career Network
Job Listings: National Conference of State Legislatures
Jobs.GovLoop.com
Opportunities in Public Affairs
PublicServiceCareers.org
Senate Employment Bulletin
TomManatosJobs.com

RESUME AND COVER LETTER HELP

Craft a Killer Cover Letter
FDA Resume Template
National Archives Federal Resume Guide
Rock Your Resume, USAJOBS-Style [Infographic]
University of Chicago Cover Letter Guide
OPPORTUNITY ASSESSMENT AND APPLICATION HELP

2014 Clearance Jobs Security Clearance Compensation Survey
3 Tips on Planning Your Federal Career Based on Vacancies
6 Body Language Tips for Interviewing
A-Z Index of U.S. Government Departments and Agencies
Best Places to Work in the Federal Government
Determining the Right Career Path for You
Government Salary Calculator
GovLoop Career Booster Toolkit
Jobs That Matter: Find a Stable, Fulfilling Career in Public Service
OPM Handbook of Occupational Groups and Families
PathtoPMF.com
Salary Negotiation Guide, Wagner School of Public Service
Thinking Strategically About Your Network: The Informational Interview