

## Four Steps to Finding Federal Employment Opportunities

If you've ever been interested in federal employment but were unsure of the steps to get there, use the four steps below to get started. As a federal government employee, you would have the opportunity to make a difference, directly influence the future of our country, and enjoy a good balance of work and life outside the job.

[Step One: Get Educated](#)

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### **Step 1: Get Educated About Federal Employment Opportunities**

Qualifications for Federal Employment: known as the General Schedule (GS) Grade Criteria, it is broken down into three different groups:

**GS 5** - Four academic years above high school leading to a bachelor's degree OR a bachelor's degree

**GS 7** - Bachelor's degree with one of the following: Class standing (upper third of class), 3.0 or higher GPA; 3.5 or higher GPA in major, Honor society membership

**GS 9** - Master's degree or equivalent



There are many websites that offer tips and advice and give a great deal of insight on the best places to search for federal positions. Try looking at the following to help you out:

[www.makingthedifference.org](http://www.makingthedifference.org) - The Red, White, and Blue Jobs Library offers tips on finding great jobs in the federal service and 17 interest-specific career guides. It makes agency profiles available, offers tips on federal resumes, and has information on profiles in public service, security clearance, and student loan repayment.

[www.calltoserve.org/toolkit](http://www.calltoserve.org/toolkit) - The Partnership for Public Service is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that works to revitalize our federal government by inspiring a new generation to serve and by transforming the way government works.

[www.bestplacestowork.org](http://www.bestplacestowork.org) - Geared toward a broad audience of job seekers, researchers, federal employees, and government leaders, *Best Places to Work* draws on responses from more than 221,000 civil servants to produce detailed rankings of employee engagement across 283 federal agencies and subcomponents. *Best Places* also offers a snapshot overview of each agency and subcomponent, trend data on changes since 2003 and 2005, tips and information for job seekers, and expert analysis of the results.



[www.usa.gov](http://www.usa.gov) - As the U.S. government's official web portal, USA.gov makes it easy for the public to get U.S. government information and services on the web. USA.gov also serves as the catalyst for a growing electronic government.

### ***Step 2: Find Specific Openings Tailored to Your Interests and Skills***

Look into websites that specialize in providing students with available federal positions:

[www.studentjobs.gov](http://www.studentjobs.gov) - This site offers a wide range of employment opportunities within the federal government specifically tailored for high school, college, and graduate school students.

[www.usajobs.gov](http://www.usajobs.gov) - The official job site for the United States federal government features everything you need to know about positions and employment opportunities within the federal government.

Make a point of familiarizing yourself with student programs specifically related to the federal government:

**Internship Program** - Offers students traditional internships geared toward summer and short term experience for any student enrolled in an accredited degree-granting institution. These are typically paid with the length of the internship set by the agency.

**Recent Graduates** - Students enrolled in an accredited degree-granting institution work in areas directly related to what they are studying, and the agency must form an agreement with the institution prior to the experience. These are typically paid, with students working 640 hours (maybe less depending on academic achievement or prior experience). Students who perform well can be hired non-competitively into the agency at the conclusion of the internship.

**Presidential Management Fellowship** - This is the government's prestigious fellowship program where students complete a two-year rotation within an agency or between agencies as full time fellows. They are eligible only to students who have completed a master's program. Applicants must apply during the fall of their final year of graduate school and the candidates must be nominated by their respective institutions.

### ***Step 3: The Application Process***

Federal resumes require much more detail than most typical resumes. Some of the essential components include information about the opening itself, personal information, education and coursework levels, and a very detailed work history/experience that will require students to provide the dates and number of hours worked per week, the specific locations of the positions, and their supervisors' contact information.

Applicants are assessed for federal opportunities using one of the following methods:



Application Questionnaire - The applications used for federal positions are often straight forward, but, like with the resumes, may ask for a little more detail than on most standard applications.

Essays - A method of answering the essay questions employs a strategy known as KSA Writing. This is a process that refers to the most effective way to answer each question by highlighting your Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities.

- KSA Writing utilizes an approach known as CCAR (Context, Challenges, Action, Result). These are simply guidelines that students can use to make their answers much more clear and informative.

- Context - Describe the specific problem you had to address. What did you have to solve, resolve, respond to, handle, etc.?

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

- Action - Describe the steps you took to solve the problem. Stay away from the ordinary – be extraordinary in your response

- Result - Describe the outcomes of your actions – use percentages, numbers, and grades. What was the difference you made – highlight only THE BEST portions.

#### Tips for KSA Writing

- Address keywords/phrases mentioned in the position description
  - Tie in personal experiences to each KSA
  - Use illustrative examples, really describe what took place
  - Focus on outcomes to which you directly contributed
  - Use plain language, without acronyms or jargon
  - Review your answers (with outside help...OCS maybe?) to ensure they are succinct, easy to read, and grammatically correct
- Save on your computer so they may be applied to other applications

To register and post your resume once it's completed, go to <http://www.usajobs.gov/>

#### **Step 4: The Interview Process**

Nothing is set in stone when it comes to federal interviews. Every agency will have a different hiring practice and a different method of questioning and evaluating. (It is humbly suggested that in order to prepare for the rigors of the interview, you should participate in take part in a *Mock Interview session*.) Most positions will fall under a 45-day hiring model. Simply put: once the job is posted, the agency will have made its decision within at least 6 weeks. If you are still waiting to hear back from an agency in 15-20 days *after the closing date* then they should contact the agency directly.

The Security Clearance Process - It's important to understand the significance of security at



the federal governmental level. It's a very rigorous and in depth process that requires a great deal of patience on the part of the applicant.

Applicants will receive the job offer and then immediately will have a background check on their criminal and credit histories. After that is completed, a more intensive clearance investigation will take place after there is confirmation that the offer has been made. The agency's decision to grant security clearance is based on these investigations. About 90% of all clearance investigations are run through one agency: the Office of Personnel Management (OPM).

Tips for the interview:

**Always arrive earlier than normal** - it's also a good idea to drive to the interview site about a week ahead of time in order to avoid any confusion once the date of the actual interview arrives

**Do your homework on the agency** - What do they do? What are the big issues taking place? Who will you be working with?

**Prepare your answers to the common questions in advance** - for example: "Tell us a little about yourself" or "Why do you think you're the best candidate for this position?"

**Dress the part: Business Casual**

Business professional, business casual, casual Fridays, casual everyday. With so many different guidelines, it's no wonder there is confusion about what is appropriate to wear in professional work settings today. There is no longer one right answer to dressing for success. Many organizations now promote their casual work environment as a benefit to attract today's college graduates. At the same time, some organizations have had to set a stricter standards for the new casual dress code because they found that employees were taking the term casual to the extreme. So how do you as a young professional just entering the workforce find a happy medium between the gray pin stripe suit and your favorite pair of sweats? Follow these guidelines and you'll soon be on your way to dressing down with style.

**General Guidelines**

Break out that ironing board because neatness still counts. Casual clothes should be clean and pressed, never sloppy.

Business casual does not mean sportswear. You should still look like a professional.

Use the couch potato test. If you would lie on the couch watching television for an hour in what you are wearing then it probably does not meet the definition of business casual.

Business casual means more casual fabric choices. Cotton, linen, corduroy, rayon, and even denim can be appropriate.



You will have a wider range of choices when it comes to color and pattern, but avoid being too bold or flashy.

### **Guidelines for Men**

Ties and an individual touch and can still be worn in a business casual environment. There are a variety of nontraditional patterns and solids that can be worn with casual button down shirts that are solid or striped or that have a subtle pattern.

Shoes should always be clean and polished, but choose a less conservative style like a loafer or plain oxford in leather or suede. Gym shoes are not usually acceptable for a professional setting so find out the guidelines in your office before making this choice.

Khakis and corduroys are a good choices for slacks. Jeans are fine in some work environments but not all. Not sure? Ask.

While a suit or sport coat and tie were considered essential at one time, business casual has opened up many more possibilities. Try button-down shirts in stripes, checks, plaids, denim, polo-style shirts, sweaters, turtlenecks, and vests. You can wear a tie with no sport coat or a sport coat without a tie.

Men should still wear a belt for the most polished appearance.

### **Guidelines for Women**

Casual choices for women can seem almost endless. Rather than a matched suit, separates are the way to go for a casual look.

Slacks or skirt? Either is appropriate.

Skirts can be a variety of lengths, just no shorter than right above the knee. Style and pattern are a matter of choice.

Slacks range from khakis on the casual end to wool or wool blend on the dressier side. Choose solids, pin-stripes, houndstooth, tweeds, or glen plaid.

Whether or not jeans are allowed, you may be able to incorporate denim into your outfit in other ways. Try a denim vest, shirt, dress, or skirt. The darker the denim the more professional the look.

Keep accessories simple. Try a scarf or neckerchief for added style.

Sore feet are a thing of the past. You can wear comfortable shoes like loafers and oxfords.

**Prepare questions for the interviewers** - this is very important because it could give you some deeper insight into whether or not you choose to accept the position if they offer you the job.