

Careers in the U.S. Government

OVERVIEW

With two million civilian government positions at more than 120 federal departments in all 50 states, Washington D.C., and U.S. territories, the United States Federal government is the nation's largest employer. While salaries may not always compare to other sectors, government jobs offer a good work-life balance with generous benefits and employment security.

In general, you must be a U.S. citizen or national (residents of American Samoa and Swains Island) to work for the Federal Government. Many government positions also require a security clearance and a background investigation as part of the hiring process.

Federal agencies are charged with handling responsibilities such as managing the U.S. space program, protecting U.S. forests, and gathering intelligence. State governments are modeled after the federal government and consist of three branches: executive, legislative, and judicial. Municipalities generally take responsibility for parks and recreation services, police and fire departments, housing services, emergency medical services, municipal courts, public transportation, and public works.

Career Areas	Sample Roles
Federal Government	Homeland Security Agent, veterans' benefits administrator, Securities and Exchange Commission accountant, NASA astronaut, CIA agent, health care exchange navigator, federal IT systems manager, FBI agent.
State Government	Elementary education administrator, state parks ranger, emergency management expert, state university professor, staff for Attorney General
County and Municipal Government	Policy analyst, city comptroller, police officer, community development specialist, records clerk, sister city manager

Exploring Opportunities in the Government

If you are interested in a career with the U.S. government, a good place to start exploring options is **USAJobs.gov**, the Federal Government's official employment site. In addition to letting you search and apply for federal jobs, the site introduces hiring paths for students and graduates. Although targeted to undergraduate students, USAJobs' "Federal Occupations by Major" can also serve as a nice introduction to possible career paths.

USA Jobs lists some 14,000 jobs every day. The site allows you to create a USAJOBS profile and a federal resume, which you then can use to apply for positions with the federal government.



Another good starting point is **GoGovernment.org**. GoGovernment offers career guides for the manifold opportunities on the federal level, and it also walks you through the application process, from putting together your application to negotiating your job offer.

State governments tend to be less centralized in their hiring practices, although most states have agencies responsible for hiring. For example, in Illinois, **Work.Illinois.Gov** lists vacancies within the departments that are under the jurisdiction of the governor. County and municipal government hiring practices vary.



What is non-competitive eligibility?

A term central to understanding Federal Government hiring is non-competitive eligibility. Non-competitive eligibility, also referred to as non-competitive status, means that a federal agency can hire you outside of the formal competitive job announcement process. Hence, non-competitive status means that you do not have to compete with the general public. This does not mean that individuals with this status are entitled to federal employment, but that they can be hired directly if they are rated “qualified” for a particular position by agency personnel specialists.

Veterans, persons with disabilities, many current and former federal employees, and Peace Corps and AmeriCorps volunteers are examples of individuals with non-competitive eligibility.

GRADUATE STUDENTS AND POSTDOCS & FEDERAL GOVERNMENT HIRING

Graduate students and postdocs bring a range of relevant skills to government positions, including project management, research, analysis, and communication skills. In addition, expertise in certain subject areas is often relevant (and sometimes required) for positions. For example, some jobs with the U.S. Agency for International Development require country or region expertise, whereas qualifying for opportunities with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention may need, for example, biological sciences knowledge.

Getting your foot in the door can be one of the hardest aspects of working for a large governmental agency. The hiring process is often slow because there can be a great deal of bureaucracy. In addition, some positions may not be open to the public and reserved for former or current employees or individuals with special status. Getting an **internship** is a good way to establish connections in the department before you apply.

In addition to applying to regular openings advertised on USAJobs.org, it is worth considering the Pathways Program, which provides three paths for current students and recent graduates.

The Pathways Program

The [Pathways Program](#) encompasses an Internship Program, Recent Graduates Program, and Presidential Management Fellowship program. The Internship and Recent Graduates Programs are administered by each hiring agency (e.g. The Department of Labor or the Department of Defense), whereas the Presidential Management Fellowship is centrally administered by the [Office of Personnel Management](#).

1. The [Internship Program](#) is for **current** students. It provides paid opportunities to work in agencies and explore federal careers while completing education. Visit the website of the agency you are interested in to find out more.
2. The [Recent Graduates Program](#) provides developmental experiences in the Federal Government, and it is intended to promote careers in the civil service for recent graduates. To be eligible, applicants must apply within two years of degree completion (with the exception of veterans). Visit the website of the agency you are interested in to find out more.
3. The [Presidential Management Fellowship](#) is a leadership development program at the entry level for advanced-degree candidates. Finalists have the opportunity to be selected for two-year appointments that include training and advancement opportunities. Applications for the PMF program typically open and close in the fall. Use the many [PMF.gov](#) resources to find out more and prepare for the application.



THE FEDERAL RESUME

The federal resume is required to apply for federal government positions. While it is sometimes perceived as daunting, USAJOBS provides a resume builder tool that makes the process of creating a federal resume straightforward. Start by creating an account on USAJobs.gov. In your account, you will find the resume builder. The resume builder will prompt you to provide your candidate information, work experience, education, and optional information, such as language skills and job-related training. A typical federal resume ranges from two to five pages and provides a much more in-depth look at your qualifications. In general, it is to your advantage to provide as much relevant information as possible.

The table below presents typical federal resume requirements and provides information on what to include. Please note that there may be additional requirements that are specified in the advertisement for opportunity that interests you. It is crucial to read job ads closely and to ensure that your resume addresses all requirements. Incomplete resumes, resumes that do not clearly communicate relevant qualifications, or resumes that do not follow requirements will typically result in your application being rejected.

Federal Resume Category	Information to Include
Candidate Information	<i>Required:</i> name, contact information, whether you claim veteran's preference, and federal employee information
Work experience	<i>Required:</i> employer, location, position title, start and end date, average hours worked per week, responsibilities and accomplishments <i>Optional:</i> supervisor name(s), salary
Education	<i>Required:</i> schools attended, degrees obtained <i>Optional:</i> grade point averages, relevant coursework, academic papers or projects, key presentations, honors and accomplishments
Optional information	Job-related training, references, language skills, affiliations, professional publications, additional information

Building Multiple Federal Resumes

While it may seem time-consuming to create a new federal resume for each position you want to apply to, it is important that you tailor each resume to the specific position you are targeting. To make the process of tailoring more time effective, build a general master resume that contains everything you have done. This master resume serves as the template for all subsequent resumes. When you apply for a position, start with the general resume, and edit it according to the duties, qualifications, and requirements of the position.

Since USAJobs allows you to save up to five federal resumes at a time, you may also consider building multiple resumes for the categories of roles you are targeting. This way, you can work from the "pre-tailored" documents when a position of interest is posted.



Additional tips for composing an effective federal resume:

- Tailor your resume
 - Focus on duties, qualifications, and requirements
 - Include keywords and phrases from the job ad; mirror language
 - Emphasize areas in which your previous experience or education overlaps with duties and qualification listed in the job announcement
- Include numbers
 - Highlight performance metrics, using percentages, numbers, and data to communicate significance
- Be comprehensive
 - Think about all activities that might qualify you for the position, including membership and/or activities related to social/religious organizations, volunteer experience, unique projects/interests, awards, or certificates

Are all Federal Government jobs posted on USAJobs.org?

No. There are several “excepted” jobs. Example of agencies that do not *a/ways* post on USAJobs.org are the Federal Reserve System, Central Intelligence Agency, Defense Intelligence Agency, U.S. Department of State, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and U.S. Agency for International Development.

Please note that applications for excepted jobs may still ask for documents similar to those requested by USAJobs.org.

RESOURCES

USAJOBS: <https://www.usajobs.gov/>

USAJOBS YouTube channel (instructional videos):

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCAGtfAdoxif6an9xM6YUIAQ>

Federal occupations by college major: <https://www.usajobs.gov/Help/working-in-government/unique-hiring-paths/students/federal-occupations-by-college-major/>

Pathways Program: <https://www.usajobs.gov/Help/working-in-government/unique-hiring-paths/students/>

United States Office of Personnel Management: <https://www.opm.gov/>

List of federal agencies: <https://www.usa.gov/federal-agencies/a>

Best Places to Work in the Federal Government®: <https://bestplacestowork.org/>

Go Government (Partnership for Public Service project): <http://gogovernment.org/index.php>

GovLoop (knowledge network for government employees): <https://www.govloop.com/>

Professional Fellowship Opportunities

AAAS Science and Technology Policy Fellowship: <https://www.aaas.org/programs/science-technology-policy-fellowships>

Christine Mirzayan Fellowship: <https://sites.nationalacademies.org/pga/policyfellows/>

California Science & Technology Fellowship: <https://ccst.us/ccst-science-fellows-program/>

