



BENEFITS OF A FEDERAL JOB

You probably know something about jobs in the private and nonprofit sectors, but did you know that...

1. The Nation's Largest Employer is Hiring

In the next five years, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) projects that more than 550,000 federal employees—one-third of the entire full-time permanent workforce—will leave the government.

OPM further projects that by 2016, 40 percent of all current federal employees will retire—that's a lot of job openings!

2. You Can Make a Difference

The work of government employee impacts the lives of every American.

You can play a vital role in addressing pressing issues, from homelessness to homeland security.

3. There's a Job for Every Interest

There are federal jobs suited to every interest and skill, from art history to zoology.

You can combine your skills with your interests—for example, use your accounting background to improve your environment, your engineering degree to improve airport security, or your biology degree to conduct cutting-edge medical research.

4. The Federal Government Can Help Pay for School

Federal agencies may help you pay back up to \$10,000 per year of your student loans.

Some agencies may pick up the tab if you decide to pursue a graduate degree.

5. You Can Advance Quickly

Federal agencies offer excellent training and development opportunities.

There are a number of "fast track" possibilities for advancement within your field.

6. There are Federal Jobs Around the Country... and Around the World

Nearly 85 percent of federal jobs are located outside of the greater metropolitan Washington, D.C. area.

More than 50,000 federal employees work abroad.

7. The Federal Government Values Diversity

The federal government has steadily increased the diversity of its workforce.

Federal agencies actively encourage minorities and individuals with disabilities to consider government

service through a variety of internship and fellowship programs.

8. Federal Jobs Pay Better Than You Think

Average government salaries are competitive for most professions.

Pay can increase pretty quickly for top candidates with strong education and experience.

9. Flexible Work Schedules and Benefits Encourage Work-Life Balance

Flexible work schedules are a major upside for those with busy schedules.

Federal benefits, including health insurance, retirement and vacation, are extremely competitive with the private sector.

10. The Federal Government Is a Career Builder

Advance your career by developing highly marketable skills.

Utilize your federal experiences as a building block for an exciting and diverse career.

Resource: <http://www.makingthedifference.org/federalbenefits/>

GETTING STARTED: FINDING FEDERAL JOB POSTINGS

The U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) is a good place to start your search. By law, most government agencies must post any vacancies open to outside applicants on their Web site—USAjobs.gov. Because not all government jobs are posted on USAjobs.gov, however, it's also important to visit the Web sites of those agencies with which you might like to work.

GETTING STARTED: THE APPLICATION PROCESS

After selecting the job to which you'd like to apply, we encourage you to consider the following tips:

Plan ahead: The application process itself can take time; to improve your chances of getting a job, be sure to allow plenty of time to thoroughly complete your application

Select carefully: Applications tailored for specific jobs that are a good match for your skills and talents will be more successful than sending out a standard resume for many jobs

Prepare for a wait: It can take weeks to months before you will hear back about an application and there may be little or no communication from the agency;

security clearances can prolong this time period

Follow-up with the agency: Contact the identified representative to learn the status of an application or to find out more about a job

THE APPLICATION

To apply, you must usually submit:

- A resume
- A description of relevant knowledge
- Your knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) essays, other essays or online questionnaire (depending on what the application asks for)
- Additional supporting information called for in the vacancy announcement

The information currently on your resume may not be enough to satisfy government employers. OPM's "[Applying for a Federal Job](#)" booklet lists all the information an applicant needs to provide for federal employment. You can edit and store up to five federal resumes at usajobs.gov. A resume containing all the required information is called a "federal resume," although there is no mandated form. Federal resumes require more detail than standard resumes. Essentials include:

- Information about the opening
- Your personal information
- Education and coursework levels
- Work experience (including dates of employment, number of hours worked per week, location of position and a supervisor's contact information)
- Other qualifications

Agencies also request eligibility information including:

- Past or current federal employment
- Veteran qualifications

Non-competitive appointment: [Peace Corps](http://www.peacecorps.gov) (www.peacecorps.gov) and [AmeriCorps](http://www.americorps.gov) (www.americorps.gov)

EXCEPTED SERVICE

Excepted service is a special authority used by the federal government, which allows agencies to use a streamlined hiring process rather than hiring through the traditional competitive process. This authority allows agencies to help meet an unusual or special hiring need. Agencies can use this authority to individuals with backgrounds in highly needed or hard to recruit areas of government, like attorneys, chaplains, medical doctors, etc., because for these types of jobs it is often impractical to use standard qualification requirements in order to rate applicant using a traditional competitive process.

The excepted service authority is also used to fill a job under a special circumstance; for example, when there is a part-time or temporary job in a remote location or when there is a critical hiring need. U.S. Office of Personnel Management may also use a special hiring authority on a case-by-case basis to make a political appointment. Special hiring authorities can also be used to hire applicants with a special disability.

Certain excepted service hiring programs also are used as fast-track ways to bring talented individuals in at the entry levels, such as the **Federal Career Intern Program** authority and the **Presidential Management Fellows Program** (www.makingthedifference.org/federalinternships/employmentprograms.shtml). These programs include training and development components and are typically two-years in duration, with the potential for conversion to a full-time permanent position.

Excepted service positions are not required to be posted on www.USAJobs.gov. As a result, it is important to look at individual agency Web sites for job announcements.

MAJOR EXCEPTED SERVICE AGENCIES

Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts: <http://www.uscourts.gov/>

Agency for International Development (USAID): <http://www.usaid.gov/careers>

Central Intelligence Agency (CIA): www.cia.gov

Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA): www.dia.mil

Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI): www.fbi.gov

Federal Reserve System, Board of Governors: www.federalreserve.gov

Government Accountability Office (GAO): <http://www.gao.gov/jobopp.htm>

Military Sealift Command (MSC): <http://www.msc.navy.mil/n1/>

National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA): www.nga.mil

National Security Agency (NSA): www.nsa.gov

Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC): <http://www.nrc.gov/who-we-are/employment.html>

Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA): www.tva.gov

Transportation Security Administration (TSA): <http://www.tsa.gov/public/display?theme=2>

U.S. Court of Federal Claims: <http://www.uscfc.uscourts.gov/>

U.S. Department of Defense Education Activity

(DODEA): www.dodea.edu

U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS):

<http://www.dhs.gov/xabout/careers/index.shtm>

U.S. Department of State:

<http://careers.state.gov/>

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA):

<http://www.va.gov/jobs/>

U.S. Mission to the United Nations:

<http://www.un.int/usa/>

U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO):

www.uspto.gov

U.S. Postal Service (USPS):

www.usps.com

U.S. Secret Service, Uniformed Division (USSS):

<http://www.secretservice.gov/opportunities.shtml>

Complete List of Federal Agencies:

<http://bestplacestowork.org/BPTW/rankings/list.php>

COMPETITIVE SERVICE

There are two main ways to enter the federal civil service—through an excepted service appointment or through a competitive process. Regardless of whether you are applying for an excepted or competitive position, what is important to recognize is that it is typical for hundreds and even thousands of individuals to apply to any one position, so take care in reading the details of the application and make sure you are addressing everything that is asked for.

Competitive Civil Service

Competitive civil service jobs are filled according to a merit system where the best qualified candidates are chosen based on an application and interview process. Managers can hire a current federal employee (promotion or transfer) or may choose to hire someone from outside the federal government.

Non-Competitive Status

Individuals who have committed to serving the country through certain programs are eligible, upon completion of the program, to be non-competitively appointed to a position in the federal government (i.e., they do not have to go through the regular competitive hiring civil service hiring process).

- AmeriCorps*VISTA members must serve one year in order to be eligible for non-competitive status
- PeaceCorps volunteers must first commit two years to the Peace Corps before receiving non-competitive status

Eligibility for non-competitive status is for a one-year period following their departure from the program. In some cases, that eligibility can be extended for up to

two additional years if the person first goes into the military or an institution of higher learning after leaving the Peace Corps or VISTA.

VETERANS' PREFERENCE AND DISABILITY ACCOMMODATIONS

If you are a veteran, you may be eligible for something called Veterans' Preference, which provides assistance in competing for a federal job. If you have a disability, it is helpful to know that the government makes it a priority to provide reasonable accommodations to individuals with disabilities.

Veterans' Preference

Veterans' Preference was established by Congress to recognize those who have served our country and, in doing so, have suffered economic loss and, in some cases, have become disabled. It is designed to give veterans extra assistance in competing for federal job.

Typically veterans must have served on active duty for at least two years during a period of war or be disabled in order to be eligible for Veterans' Preference. Veterans receive an additional 5 to 10 points which is added to their score on the competitive civil service examination. Veterans' preference does not guarantee the veteran a job.

For more information about Veterans Preference visit:

www.opm.gov/veterans/html/vetsInfo.asp

Disability Accommodations

Federal agencies provide reasonable accommodations to individuals with disabilities, as long as you meet the job qualifications. Some of the accommodations provided include:

- TTYs for use with telephones
- Hardware and software that make computers accessible if you have vision impairments or difficulty using your hands
- Sign language interpreters or readers
- Training and other written materials in an alternative formats (e.g., braille, audio tape, computer disk)
- Physical changes, such as installing a ramp or modifying a workspace

SECURITY CLEARANCES

AGENCIES THAT REQUIRE SECURITY CLEARANCES

Everyone hired for a federal job undergoes a basic background check of their criminal and credit histories.

In addition, jobs that include access to sensitive information generally require a security clearance, which requires a more intensive background

investigation that begins after someone has already received a job offer. Examples of agencies which may require high levels of security clearance include the:

- U.S. State Department
- Intelligence Community (e.g., CIA, FBI)
- U.S. Agency for International Development
- Department of Defense
- National Nuclear Security Administration

SECURITY CLEARANCE PROCESS

Federal jobs that involve access to sensitive information often require a security clearance.

Applying for these jobs is a four-step process:

1. Receiving the job offer
2. A basic background check of the individual's criminal and credit histories
A basic background check includes a review of law enforcement records and verification of education, past employment and citizenship. Being honest is more important than having a spotless record. Past mistakes will be considered on a case-by-case basis, but falsification of records (including omission of important events) will generally disqualify you for a job.
3. A more intensive clearance investigation once the offer has been made
4. The agency's decision of whether or not to grant clearance, based on the clearance investigation

About 90% of background investigations go through one agency, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM).

The hiring agency makes the ultimate decisions about the job offer and granting clearance and therefore dictates how long these steps will take. OPM's Web site (http://www.opm.gov/Products_and_Services/Investigations/FAQs.asp) answers many questions about the rest of the process (steps 2 and 3).

TIPS FOR SMOOTH SECURITY CLEARANCE PROCESS

- Ensure your package is complete with properly rolled fingerprints.
- Follow up after a reasonable interval (roughly a month) if you have not heard back.
- It may be possible to work for the agency in a nonsensitive position (also referred to as a "low public trust") while you wait for the security clearance. Ask your agency for details.
- Prepare in advance: know the kinds of questions that will be asked of you as you seek to get a security clearance. See the "Standard form 86" (http://www.opm.gov/forms/pdf_fill/sf86.pdf) on OPM's Web site.

- Keep track of where you live and a contact who knew you when you lived at each place. This is especially important if you study abroad, because it's often hard to reestablish contact with someone overseas if you no longer have up-to-date contact information.
- Consider a summer internship with an agency that requires a security clearance. If you need a security clearance after graduation, getting an updated clearance will be considerably faster than the initial investigation. Note that such internships generally have deadlines before November 1.

USAJOBS.GOV TIPS

You are probably familiar with some of the common job search sites, such as Monster.com, CareerBuilder.com and Idealist.org. As the nation's largest employer, the federal government maintains its own job search site, **USAJobs.gov**, which is a great place to begin learning more about the tens of thousands of jobs that are available at any given time, and is naturally an important site to be familiar with if you are serious about applying for a federal job. USAJobs has many of the common features of a job search site — scroll down for tips on how to maximize your time on the site.

- Click on the "Search Jobs" button on the USAJobs homepage, you'll be taken to the central job search screen. Here, you can sort and search through federal jobs by geographic location, by job category, by pay grade or salary, or by entering a key word that you think might be found in a job you're interested in. You'll see each of these categories appear as you scroll down the page.
- The **Key Word Search** can help you narrow your search to only those positions that fit your expertise and experience. If you're looking for a job with a specific title (e.g., engineer or "electrical engineer"), you can type that title into this box and the search will only show you jobs that match your description.
- Using the **Location Search** is fairly simple—if you'd only like to see jobs that are open in a specific place, scroll down through the list of locations and highlight the one that you're most interested in.
- The **Job Category Search** is also a useful way to tailor the listings you see to your personal skills and interests. To use this tool, scroll through the list and select the description that best matches the position you're seeking.
- The **Salary Range and Pay Grade Range (GS) Search** can help make sure that you don't browse through jobs that are either above or

below your level of expertise and education. *If you have a Bachelors Degree, you should use the Pay Grade Range boxes and select GS-5 through GS-7. If you have a master's degree, you should begin your search at the GS-9 level. If you've had an extensive work record, these guidelines may not be quite right—keep searching with the Pay Grade Range until you find a level that you think best fits your education and experience.*

- You'll see a section towards the bottom of the search page labeled **Applicant Eligibility**. Read the question it asks carefully—if you can truthfully answer “yes,” you should be sure to do so, as that can broaden the range of federal jobs available to you. If you're not sure whether or not you can answer “yes,” or are not sure what some of the terms mean, leave the “no” option selected.
- Once you've set up the search just the way you want it, click “Search for Jobs” at the bottom of the page (you are able to sort the results by keyword or date as well as have the option between a brief or detailed description).
- If you've set up your search broadly enough, you should now see a number of federal job descriptions displayed on your screen. You can click on any of them that you think might be interesting to read more about them. If you find a job that you're really interested in, be sure to read the job description carefully to make sure that you're eligible to apply and to learn how to begin the application process.
- Once you're happy with the way your search is set up, you should consider clicking on the “**Save this search** and email me jobs” link at the bottom of the page. This will allow you to receive daily, weekly, bi-weekly or monthly emails that will contain all the new jobs that meet your criteria. To use this feature, you'll have to create an account on the USAJobs Web site—simply click on the box that says “**Create your account now**” and fill in the necessary information.
- **Becoming a member also allows you the opportunity to post your resume so that employers can search for you. If you have graduated or in your final semester and have a cumulative GPA of 3.5 (out of 4.0) or higher, you can apply to be a part of the Outstanding Scholars Program. You would then have the option of signing up for additional searches through their Web site.**

BUILDING YOUR RESUME USING USAJOBS

After you click on the “Create a Resume” button and register with the USAJobs Web site, you'll see that the

resume-building process has four basic steps: Getting Started, Experience, Related Information, and Finishing Up. At any point during this process, you can click the “Save For Later” button at the bottom of the page and return to your resume at a later time. As you complete the resume building process, keep an eye out for blue circles with question marks inside, as these can help explain the step you're working on.

GETTING STARTED

On the Getting Started page, you'll be asked for your basic contact information. Be sure to fill out all of those boxes marked with a red asterisk—they're mandatory. The one major decision you face here is whether to make your resume confidential or non-confidential. Marking your resume as confidential will prevent federal recruiters from easily learning your current contact information and employer. If a federal recruiter is interested in your resume, they'll send you a message through USAJobs and you'll have the option to give them that information. Marking your resume as confidential will not hide the entire document from federal recruiters—you'll have the chance to do that later.

EXPERIENCE

The Experience section is where you will list your career experience and educational achievements. Fill out both the work experience and education sections with a single record at a time. Once you click “Add Work Experience” or “Add Education” buttons, you'll be able to add information about other jobs you may have had or schools you may have attended. At the bottom of the Experience page, there's an optional section that will allow you to list any job related training you may have had. If you've taken relevant courses or attended valuable training sessions, be sure to include them here!

RELATED INFORMATION

The Related Information tab provides another opportunity for you to add information about yourself that recruiters may value. List personal and professional references, languages you speak, organizations to which you belong, publications to which you have contributed and awards which you have received on this page.

Toward the bottom of the page, you'll notice that the site asks you what type of employment you'd be willing to consider. This choice may seem daunting at first, but don't fret—if you click the question mark next to the word “Availability,” you'll find short descriptions of each of these job types. Read these descriptions and you'll be able to make an informed decision about what sort of job you're looking for.

Below the “Availability” section, you'll find the “Desired Locations” box that will allow you to let federal

recruiters know of any geographic preferences you have. Feel free to select as many or as few locations as you like.

FINISHING UP

Once you click through to the Finishing Up page, you'll have the option to automatically spell-check your resume. This is a good idea since spelling errors tend to reflect poorly on job applicants. This is also a good time to click the "Preview Your Resume" button along the left side of the page. You'll be able to see your resume just as federal recruiters will see it.

After you're satisfied with the shape your resume is in, click the "Activate Resume" button. This will send your resume out into the pool of other applicants and allow federal recruiters to find it in their searches.

Whether you decide to make your resume searchable or not, you'll be able to use it if you find a position on USAJobs that accepts online applications. Look for the "Apply Online" button at the bottom of a job posting to see if the position you're interested in qualifies. If you decide to submit your resume electronically, make sure to read the job description carefully to ensure that all of the information that it asks for is included in your resume.

KSA FACTORS

KSAs—an acronym for Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities—are a set of questions to help determine if you are a good fit for a job, based on (you guessed

it!) your combined set of job-related knowledge, skills, and abilities.

Vacancy announcements list the specific knowledge, skills, and abilities an agency wants to see in a candidate. In your application you need to describe in writing how your experiences match the desired KSA factors. KSAs are very important to federal employers—how far you get in the application process will likely be determined by your ability to convincingly address these factors. Be sure to include as much information as you can that responds to each KSA factor, even if that information is already included on your federal resume.

ISN'T MY RESUME ENOUGH?

In a word, no. A resume is an important component of the job application process, but addressing the KSAs listed in a federal job opening gives you an extra chance to draw attention to your strengths and expand upon the specific factors the agency is looking for. Don't exclude anything from your KSA responses just because it is on your resume.

DECODING KSAS

Think of KSAs as a set of interview questions. This way, you can look at the KSAs as an opportunity to use real-life examples to sell the experiences, education, and activities listed on your resume. Below are examples of real job openings and their associated KSAs from USAJobs.gov, plus a question that an interviewer might ask to get at the same information.

A Job Announcement For	...Includes a KSA That Reads	...Which is Like an Interviewer Asking
Investigative Assistant GS 5/6	Ability to gather facts and communicate findings clearly, both orally and in writing.	"Tell me about a project you worked on in school or in a previous job in which you had to write a report and present the findings to an audience."
Accountant GS 5-12	Professional knowledge of accounting methods, principles and procedures in order to evaluate, design, implement and modify systems for adequacy and accuracy of accounting information.	"What accounting methods and principles have you learned that will enable you to evaluate or modify accounting systems? Also, can you tell me about any internships or school projects in which you utilized accounting methods and principles, and how you used them?"
Park Ranger GS 7	Knowledge of recreation site operation and maintenance techniques and ability to apply them to work.	"I see you volunteered regularly at the regional nature center during your four years in college, and that you worked as a life guard for a few summers. What did you learn in those experiences and how would you apply it to this job?"
Microbiologist GS 7-9	Knowledge of safety procedures and safe handling of hazardous biological agents.	"What experience do you have working in a lab with hazardous biological agents? If somebody in your lab accidentally knocked over a hazardous sample, what procedures would you follow?"
Intelligence Specialist GS-9	Skill at making presentations in front of a group.	"Tell me about a time when you had to make a persuasive argument, perhaps for a class project or internship. Tell me about another time when you had to make a presentation for a large audience and the tools and techniques you used."

WRITING A KSA

Apply the same rules when writing KSAs that you would in submitting an essay response or writing sample—use the active tense, don't ramble, and make sure you are answering the question being asked. Most importantly, don't forget to read it over before submitting your responses!

KSA TIPS

Read the job announcement carefully, highlighting key words or phrases describing the position responsibilities so you remember to address those points in your KSA responses.

Go back to your résumé and outline a list of experiences you've had that address each KSA. Review each list and select the items that best illustrate a link between your experience and each KSA as you compose your responses.

Add information relevant to each KSA that may not be included in your resume—such as any specialized training, publications, leadership roles, student activities, and awards. Make sure you take credit for your entire range of experiences including volunteer work, internships, school projects, and extracurricular activities.

Link all these different examples explicitly to the KSA questions. Whether you've worked as a waitress or cashier, served as a student club officer, or volunteered at a nursing home, the key is to tie these experiences back to the KSAs in a way that demonstrates that you are the best candidate for the job being advertised.

Write your KSAs in the first person, and use concrete examples to illustrate your skills. This is your opportunity to more fully elaborate on skills and responsibilities outlined in your resume, and examples are much more compelling than simple assertions.

Be sure to include examples that demonstrate your ability to take initiative.

Focus on any outcomes to which you directly contributed, citing quantitative data where possible. For example, use data that measures how much (like how much money or time you generated or saved), or how many (like how many people attended, how many units you produced), and point to positive change (percentage growth or savings) wherever possible.

Make sure your answers reflect your level of responsibility. Similarly, clearly identify who you interacted with and how (e.g., providing key information to a manager, working with a group of peers, or supervising a team).

Tailor each KSA answer to read between half a page

and a page in length. Remember that a busy person will be reading through your application, so it is important to find the right balance between providing compelling information and information overload.

Review your answers to ensure they are succinct and easy to read. Always use plain language and don't use acronyms. Focus on content, and don't forget to proofread.

Ask a friend who knows you well to read over your finished answers. Your reader should make sure that you have included all of your relevant experiences, that your responses flow well, and that the answers don't contain any typos or grammatical errors.

A SAMPLE KSA

Below are examples of answers to a common KSA, "skill in written communication." It should be clear to you which is the stronger response.

Example of a Poor Response

My communication skills are excellent. I am often asked to help out in this regard and have been commended for my work.

Example of a Better Response

In the past 10 months, I have taken over a number of writing assignments previously held by my supervisor:

- I have been drafting monthly reports on leasing activities under the purview of our office. These are routinely approved by my supervisor without change and are circulated to 10 field offices and Regional Directors.
- I have assumed the responsibility of reporter for the quarterly meeting of the bureau's Research Directors. Reports of these meetings are reviewed by the Director's Office prior to distribution to all participants.
- In January, I completed the course, "Writing Analytical Reports," offered through the National Independent Study Center. This was a six-month course involving 24 hours of training and covering such areas as: planning an analytical report; collecting and analyzing data; identifying possible solutions to problems addressed in the report; and organizing, writing, and editing the report.

In addition, while I was a student in college I developed and was recognized for my strong written communication skills in a variety of capacities:

- After my junior year, I was selected for a summer internship with my state representative, for whom I drafted constituent correspondence and press releases. Though I was an intern, the majority of the letters and press releases I wrote were sent out without modification.

- During my senior year, I served as the chapter president of my honor society, and routinely wrote progress reports to send to the headquarters of the honor society.
- Throughout college I was a staff writer for the student daily newspaper. As a reporter I wrote both short news stories as well as in-depth feature articles on a weekly basis, and was selected for the feature writing award by the editorial board my junior year.

FIND A LIST OF HOT JOBS

www.makingthedifference.org/federaljobs/hotjobs.shtml

Resource: <http://www.makingthedifference.org/federaljobs/>.
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