Applying to Federal Jobs and Internships

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Here to help you get ahead.

The Pathways Programs

In order to compete more effectively with the private sector when hiring new talent, the federal government began implementing Executive Order 13562, entitled "Recruiting and Hiring Students and Recent Graduates," in July 2012. The order established the Pathways Programs, consisting of two new offerings – the Internship Program for current students and the Recent Graduates Program for people who have recently (within two years) graduated from qualifying educational institutions or programs – and the reinvigorated Presidential Management Fellows (PMF) Program for people who obtained an advanced (e.g., graduate or professional) degree within the preceding two years.

Internship Program
www.opm.gov/HiringReform/Pathways/program/interns/

The Internship Program, administered primarily by individual agencies, is for current students, replacing the Student Career Experience Program (SCEP) and Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP). The new Internship Program provides college students (among others) with paid opportunities to work in agencies and explore federal careers while completing their education. Interns may be eligible to convert to permanent positions upon successful job performance, completion of a minimum number of internship hours and completion of degree.

Recent Graduates Program
www.opm.gov/HiringReform/Pathways/program/graduates/

The Recent Graduates Program provides developmental experiences in the federal government. The one-year program (specific departments may require longer training) is intended to promote possible careers in the civil service to individuals who, within the previous two years, graduated from qualifying educational institutions with an associate's, bachelor's, master's, professional, doctorate, vocational or technical degree or certificate from qualifying educational institutions. To be eligible, applicants must apply within two years of degree or certificate completion except for veterans precluded from doing so due to their military service obligation, who will have up to six years after degree or certificate completion to apply. For more information about Federal employment information for veterans, go to OPM's FedsHireVets.gov website.

The Recent Graduates Program is administered primarily by individual agencies and includes orientation, training, mentorship and career planning. Upon completion of at least one year of continuous service with successful job performance, Recent Graduates may earn conversion to permanent positions.

Presidential Management Fellows (PMF) Program
www.opm.gov/HiringReform/Pathways/program/fellows/

For more than three decades, the PMF Program has been the federal government's premier leadership development program for advanced degree (e.g., masters or professional) candidates. Beginning in July 2012 the eligibility window for applicants expands to those who have earned a qualifying advanced degree within the preceding two years to participate. The PMF program provides fellows a two-year excepted-service position along with orientation, training, mentorship, career planning assistance and other support to hopefully convert fellows to permanent positions in competitive federal service. The program is administered centrally through the Office of Personnel Management (OPM).

Tools for searching

http://gogovernment.org/government_careers/students_entry-level_talent.php
Visit the Partnership for Public Service's seeker site for entry-level job seekers, including college students, for resources and tools

www.usa.gov
The U.S. Government's official web portal
- Check out the Jobs and Unemployment section
- **Always look for positions on agency-specific websites**; use the A-Z index

www.bestplacestowork.org
The most comprehensive and authoritative rating of employee satisfaction in the federal government
- Responses from 221,000+ civil servants across 283 federal agencies and subcomponents
- Scores agencies in 10 workplace environment categories such as effective leadership, employee skills/mission match, and work/life balance
- Offers snapshot overview of each agency and subcomponent, trend data, tips and information for job seekers, and expert analysis of what the results mean

www.usajobs.gov
- Main posting site for all full-time, permanent federal jobs
- Use resume builder to create federal resume
- Pay grade GS 5-7 is typical for entry-level jobs for new grads
- Many entry-level jobs through special programs like the Pathways Programs may not posted be here – make sure to also look at individual agency websites.
- Any postings that have closing dates less than two weeks from posting dates are not worth applying for – they have an internal candidate in mind.
- To find a list of job titles by major, go to https://help.usajobs.gov/index.php/Federal_Occupations_by_College_Major

Online application process

- Though resume formats common in the private sector are now technically accepted from applicants, if they don't contain all the requisite information they will not be effective. A more thorough "federal" resume is still the safer choice, so create one using the resume builder at www.usajobs.gov.
- Be sure to complete any requested forms or questionnaires that must accompany resume.
- Submit complete application package by stated deadline.
- Follow up with posting's agency contact to inquire about progress in hiring for position; contact information of some kind is listed for each position vacancy.

Online federal resume
- Go to www.usajobs.gov and go to "Create an Account" in the top right corner. Once you've set up an account, you can use the resume creating tool. Be very detailed in your resume – do not limit yourself to one page. Resumes are

assessed on a point basis. You can only earn points for experiences you explicitly detail on your resume.

- Sections include:
  - Candidate information
  - Work experience
  - Education
  - References
  - Affiliations
  - Desired locations

Federal resume components

Federal resumes require more detail than other resumes:

- Information about the opening (e.g. vacancy #)
- Your personal information (e.g. SSN)
- Education and coursework levels
- Work experiences
  - Dates and number of hours per week
  - Location of position; supervisor contact information
- Other qualifications

Sample questionnaire

The following statement might appear on a questionnaire, requiring you to pick the answer that best describes your experience:

Serve as primary point of contact for a specific subject matter.

A. I have not had education, training, or experience in performing this task
B. I have had education or training in performing the task, but have not yet performed it on the job
C. I have performed this task on the job. My work on this task was monitored closely by a supervisor or senior employee to ensure compliance with proper procedures
D. I have performed this task as a regular part of my job. I have performed it independently and normally without review by a supervisor or senior employee.
E. I am considered an expert in performing this task. I have supervised performance of this task or am normally the person who is consulted by other workers to assist them in this task because of my expertise

KSA application essays

- Many agencies no longer use Knowledge, Skills, Abilities (KSA) essays as part of the initial application to address characteristics they seek, but KSAs may be used later in the application process.
- Can be extremely important in the evaluation process in sorting out the best-qualified candidates
- Vary depending on the job, but examples include: skill in written and oral communications; demonstrated technical ability; knowledge or specific subject matter areas
- Are similar to interview questions; answers should provide concrete examples (coursework and volunteer experience count), particularly to demonstrate quantifiable results, complexity, or leadership
- Should be a narrative written in first person and about 1-2 pages each; give 3 examples per KSA (1 example per paragraph)
- Responses should:
  - Address key words/ phrases mentioned in the position description
  - Tie your experience to each KSA
  - Use illustrative examples
  - Focus on outcomes to which you directly contributed
  - Use plain language, without acronyms
- Review your answers to ensure they are succinct, easy to read and grammatically correct

KSA response approach: CCAR

- **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 from upper management, etc.
- **Action:** Describe the steps you took to solve the problem (Stay away from the ordinary; be extraordinary in your response)
- **Result:** Outcomes of your actions; use %, #s, grades (what was the difference you made; highlight THE BEST)

Sample KSA

- **Prompt:** Skill in applying engineering concepts and theories to the solution of engineering problems
- **Response: "**Earning undergraduate and graduate degrees in mechanical engineering has given me a firm foundation of the engineering principles necessary to solve challenging problems. As a senior engineering major I often tutored freshmen in introductory level engineering classes such as Dynamic Analysis and Fluid Mechanics. For my thesis project at the University of Michigan I designed a remote controllable Geiger counter that could be used by the military to detect radiation sources that are too hazardous for personnel to approach. The project gave me the opportunity to solidify my knowledge of physical, chemical, and mathematical concepts as they apply to the real world. For my work on my thesis I received the highest honors from the university and my paper has since been published in an academic journal."

What happens after you submit your application?

- After the application closing date, the agency evaluates candidate qualifications
  - From this assessment, the agency produces a list of qualified candidates
  - From the list of qualified applicants, agencies select candidates for interviews
- From this point, agencies are like other employers, conducting interviews and selecting the best candidate(s) for the job
- Note that some jobs require security clearance

Federal job application process summary

- **Plan ahead:** Allow plenty of time to thoroughly complete your application.
- **Select carefully:** Always consider using a tailored application for each vacancy you apply.
- **Prepare for a wait:** Don't assume you've been rejected if you don't hear back within weeks of submitting your application.
- **Follow up with agency:** Contact the identified representative to learn the status of an application or find out more about a job.