

How to Apply for Federal Jobs

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Applying for Federal jobs can be confusing. However, if an applicant follows the directions below, it is possible to navigate through the system and successfully obtain a position with the Federal Government.

The steps involved in applying include:

1. Find the positions to apply for
2. Identify the requirements for applying for each job / Match background and skills to the job requirements
3. Develop the application materials
4. Submit the application – use Electronic formats if at all possible

Finding Positions to Apply For:

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has a website, USAJobs.com, which allows potential applicants to search most positions being posted for civilian employees. A user can select and enter the appropriate search criteria – including job titles, job series, grade levels, agencies, special appointment status and position locations. Some agencies have additional jobs listed on their agency websites - especially positions for Attorneys, students, and other positions not covered by unions.

Identifying Job and Application Requirements (How to Read Job Announcements):

Once a job announcement is found, a potential applicant needs to determine the application requirements.

First, the announcement will indicate who may apply. If it is the Public, generally all US Citizens can apply for the job. If it is Status Candidates Only, one must read the announcement carefully to determine who is eligible. Generally, in this case, federal government employees, military spouses or veterans who have separated in the past 3 years or who are eligible for veteran preference points may be considered a Status Candidate. If it says Agency Employees Only and the applicant is not currently employed as a civil servant in that agency, the applicant is not eligible to apply.

Second, the announcement will indicate the date the announcement closes. Application materials must be submitted according to the instructions in the announcement by the closing date (and sometimes closing time). The announcement will detail how to submit materials – it is announcement specific. For most jobs, you will be able to apply online. However, for other jobs, you may be required to / or have an option to apply via other methods, including fax, email, mail, or hand delivery.

Third, the position will indicate salary and grade level. Grade levels for jobs indicate the management level within the government – and the level of responsibility. Based on experience, veterans retiring at the E-7 level generally qualify for positions at the GS-9 level. O-3 professionals generally qualify at the GS-11 or 12 level; depending on area of expertise. In our experience, the following grade levels apply, unless you have a LOT of expertise in the area you are looking for or know someone special. We have found this may not hold for certain intelligence positions.

Fourth, the announcement will list the job duties – in most cases. A potential applicant should read the duties carefully – they contain the keywords required for the job. In general, the resumes selected for further consideration contain these keywords, with dynamic statements showing how the applicant has experience doing the duties required for the job. When one reads an announcement, they should ask themselves whether they have done that particular function previously AND if they have any demonstrated success in doing the function.

Fifth, the announcement will list the background requirements. For Federal jobs, unlike Civilian jobs, an applicant's background MUST match the stated requirements for the job. For example, if a degree is stated as required, it is required. If certification, including DAWAI contracting certification, is stated as a requirement, it is required. If no candidates apply that meet the requirements, the agency will cancel the announcement and rewrite and repost the position again.

Sixth, the announcement, in most cases, has a separate Vacancy Questionnaire. Look for a link in the announcement to be able to show the questions. You must be able to address every item in the questionnaire. Some questions will ask if you are an expert in something. To be selected as Best Qualified for the job, you likely will need to be the expert in all the items asked for in the questionnaire. You must address each item you answer in the questionnaire in your resume - the scoring official will check this.

In addition to / or instead of a questionnaire - the announcement may indicate if Knowledge Skill and Ability Statements (KSAs) or other essays, including Selective Preference Factors, Technical Qualifications or Professional Qualifications are required.

In addition, the announcement may indicate that multiple choice questions also will need to be answered. You must be

Note, if the announcement is for some online formats, including AVUE or USAJOBS, the KSAs or other questions may not be in the actual announcement. Instead, they are found during the application process – or if you are lucky, you may be able to find the questions by further reading the announcement (How to Apply or Qualifications section) or with a separate click in the announcement itself. At times, especially if an applicant is applying for an announcement with the FAA or through AVUE, in order to find the vacancy questions, an applicant may need to start the application just to find the KSA or other questions.

If an announcement has KSAs or other essays, they must be written. A potential applicant should read each KSA and ask themselves if they have any experience or background in the question being asked. If not, the announcement will most likely NOT be the right one to apply for. If an announcement has KSAs in the announcement, but not separate – they must be addressed in the resume.

In addition, you must address each answer you make in the online questionnaire in your resume.

Seventh, the announcement will indicate how to apply. If the announcement indicates a resume is acceptable for application, a Federal resume will need to be developed. However, the information you will need may differ depending on the announcement. For most announcements, you can and should upload the Federal resume, along with other required documentation to apply. If an online application can be made, generally a link or an “Apply Online” button is shown on the announcement. Clicking on the link or button will bring the user to the agency’s website with further instructions on how to apply for the job. There are several online formats, including USAJobs and AVUE. It is complicated, and the requirements formats can change. In the past there were more formats, such as Resumix, QuickHire, FAA, OF-612 and SF-171 – but these have been retired and are now obsolete.

Eighth, the announcement may indicate other documentation is required. Carefully read each announcement and send the information required. If it is not asked for, do not send it. However, if you do not send the required information, you will not be considered for the announcement.

Develop Application Materials:

Once an applicant determines the application requirements, the application materials must be developed. Federal resumes must conform to specific informational requirements. They must include ALL the information required, or the application may be discarded. Based on the announcement and application format, a federal resume generally includes the following information:

Job Information:

- Announcement number, and title and grade(s) which are being applied for

Personal Information:

- Full name, mailing address (with ZIP code)
- Home, cell and work phone numbers (with area code)
- E-Mail address
- Social Security Number (If specifically asked for. For some announcement, they specifically ask you NOT to provide your Social Security number – you need to read the announcement)
- Country of citizenship (most federal jobs require United States citizenship)

- Veterans' preference
- Highest Federal civilian grade held (give job series and dates held)
- Clearance (Belongs in the Header - since many announcements ask for this)

Professional summary – written in 1st person (this may be placed at the beginning for a free form resume – in other information for other formats, such as the USAJobs Online format)

Work Experience:

- Job title (include series and grade if federal job – level in military if a veteran)
- Employer's name and full address, including street address, city, state and ZIP code (some online formats do not require the exact address)
- Supervisor's name and phone number
- Starting and ending dates (month and year) [note: some formats require month, date and year]
- Hours per week
- Salary
- Indicate if current supervisor may be contacted
- Job duties – include quantification and keywords in the announcement – written in 1st person without the word "I"
- Job accomplishments – include quantification – in the challenge-action-result format – written in 1st person without the word "I"

Education:

- For colleges and universities:
 - Name, city, state and ZIP Code
 - Major(s), Type and year of any degrees received
 - GPA
 - Total credits and types of credits earned, i.e. quarter, credit or semester hours.
 - Honors
 - Course list
 - Note: only list accredited colleges listed at <http://www.ope.ed.gov/accreditation/search.asp>. If an applicant lists degrees from schools not on the accreditation list, they may be subject for disqualification from federal employment and in some states also subject to criminal prosecution.
- For high school: Date of diploma or GED, high school name, city, state and ZIP Code

Other Qualifications:

- Job-related training courses, including course title, date (may be year or month and year), course duration (hours, days or months)
- Certifications and licenses (include Secret or Top Secret clearance here if an online form)
- Job-related skills, for example, other languages, computer software/hardware, tools, machinery, typing speed
- Job-related honors, awards, and special accomplishments, for example, publications, memberships in professional or honor societies, leadership activities, public speaking, and performance awards

The exact format of the resume, as noted above, will differ, depending on the application requirements. However, much, if not all, the information above is required for developing a federal resume.

For some applications – including written applications, a Cover Letter can help summarize an applicant's background and experience for the hiring authority. Unless indicated in the job announcement, a cover letter is not used for scoring.