



## UNDERSTANDING THE FEDERAL HIRING PROCESS

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As a seasoned professional in the private sector, you likely have a solid understanding of how the hiring process works. However, if you decide to pursue employment with the federal government you will find that there are some distinct differences from your past job-seeking experiences. Knowing these differences and using them to your advantage will make your application experience go more smoothly and will ultimately help you to be a more successful job candidate.

### GETTING STARTED: A FEW TIPS

First and foremost, you should know that the application process for virtually all federal jobs is conducted through the Web site USAJOBS.gov, which is described in further detail below.

After selecting the job for which you'd like to apply, keep the following in mind:



#### **Plan ahead**

The federal application process itself can take time and may have more steps than you are used to in the private sector; 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. Make sure to read about building your federal resume and KSA writing before you apply.



#### **Prepare for a wait**

Sometimes, it can take weeks before you will hear back about an application and there may be little or no communication from the agency during this time. Every federal job requires a background check before being offered the position. If the position is related to national security, you will be instructed to complete the security clearance process once you receive an offer. This can prolong this time period.

### USING USAJOBS

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 — read below for tips on how to maximize your time on the site.

- Click on the “**Search**” 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.

## JOB QUALIFICATION REQUIREMENTS

In the private sector, employers typically list a set of desired skills, education levels, and experiences in job announcements. While applicants are evaluated primarily based on how well their resumes match the position's qualifications, hiring managers in the private sector often have some flexibility in adjusting the position to match the skills of the applicants who respond.

In the federal government, hiring managers do not have this flexibility. Rather, they adhere to strict qualifications that, if you are unfamiliar with them, can hurt your chances of gaining employment at a federal agency.

Therefore, when applying for a federal job it is important for you to understand the qualification requirements of the position as well as how your application will be assessed. You should know up front:

1. Once you have submitted all required materials, the agency will review your application to determine if you meet minimum qualification requirements for the position. If you are not qualified, you will not be considered for the job. If you are qualified, your application will be reviewed along with other qualified candidates to determine if you are among the candidates referred for consideration.
2. The review of your application will be through a careful process involving the comparison of your qualifications to specific knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) required by the position. Once the evaluation is complete, those who meet minimum/basic qualification requirements are ranked in the order of their scores, with veterans' preference applied, and referred to the hiring manager.

While this process is more regimented than in the private sector, knowledge of how the process works can be used to your advantage as an applicant. Federal job postings enable you not only to determine if you are qualified for the position before you apply, but also they can serve as a guide for how to write your federal resume for the position and how to respond to the KSAs.