

Federal Service: Navigating Applications and Landing Your First Job

What types of jobs are there in Federal Service?

1. Foreign Service
 - In addition to the State Department, several other agencies have foreign services including the Department of Commerce, the Department of Agriculture, and USAID
 - Each agency has its own specific application process
2. Civil Service
 - To enter the civil service you can apply directly through USAJobs, participate in the Pathways Internship program, or enter through a fellowship program like the Presidential Management Fellowship
3. Political Appointments
 - Political appointment positions are limited to the term of the administration
 - The hiring process is conducted by the Office of Presidential Personnel (OPP) in the White House, does not go through USAJobs, and is regarded as more “straightforward” than hiring for the civil service
 - Many appointees, especially at the junior-level, worked or volunteered for the campaign, so if this is a path you are considering, think about getting involved before the election

Navigating USAJobs.gov: What makes for a strong application?

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- Be judicious, thoughtful, and strategic in your application
- Tailor each application and make sure that you meet all of the qualifications
- Use key phrases from the job description to help pass the initial screening by bots
- Use the Federal Resume Builder to help avoid errors and ensure that you include all relevant information
- A federal resume is longer than a private sector resume, and is typically 3-5 pages
- Make a master resume with everything you’ve done. You can pull from your master resume and create tailored resumes for each job
- Save flourishes and creative formatting for your private sector resume

Pathways and building your network

- Be fluid, flexible, and patient in your job search!
- Try to think creatively about the different paths you are willing to take like internships, fellowships and contracting jobs
- Students and alumni can contact their college career office for information on fellowships or other guidance
- Join alumni networks or professional associations to make connections and ask for advice or informational interviews
- Remember, there are lots of jobs and opportunities outside of Washington
- When you apply for a fellowship, always tie your application back to the purpose of the fellowship
- Once you get in, don’t stop networking! Find your champions and the people who will speak for you and share opportunities with you as you navigate the federal service
- To effectively network you want to build relationships--don’t treat conversations as “transactional”

The hiring process

- When a job is posted on USAJobs, the person hiring may have an internal candidate in mind, or they might receive applications from candidates with preferential status, like veterans. There's no way of knowing this from the outside, so if you're applying through USAJobs, don't get discouraged and keep applying!
- The timeline for federal service hiring can be very long, but you will always hear back if you are no longer being considered, so don't assume the worst if you haven't heard anything
- Once you have an offer, you can negotiate. Hiring managers have less flexibility than in the public sector, but you can try to negotiate a higher step within the grade level, just make sure to have clear justification