

# GUIDE

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## FINDING AND APPLYING FOR A GOVERNMENT JOB



# Introduction

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The work of government employees impacts the lives of every American, and the lives of people around the world. You can play a vital role in addressing pressing issues, from climate change to outdoor conservation and recreation.

The purpose of this guide is to introduce government career opportunities and approaches to those interested in working IN or FOR the “outdoors”.



# YOUR PATH TO WORKING WITH A GOVERNMENT AGENCY

## Jobs for every interest

There are federal jobs suited to every interest and skill, from geology to engineering. Government careers are a great place to combine both your skills and your interests. For example, you could use your mathematics background and your interest in the environment by working as an accountant at the Environmental Protection Agency, your biology degree to become a biological scientist for the US Forest Service.

## Not a sprint, but a marathon

Many complain of the lengthy hiring process. Starting a career in the Federal government requires patience and persistence. The majority of jobs are listed at USAJOBS – the job portal for government jobs. There are also many programs for students and recent graduates for “getting a foot in the door” through seasonal work, internships, volunteering, or other programs.



# SEARCHING FOR A GOVERNMENT JOB

**There are 2 main ways government jobs are filled:**

## Competitive Services

**Most jobs are filled through competitive services. Established laws and procedures govern the hiring of most federal employees so that the process is fair and based on merit rather than discrimination or favoritism.**

### Competitive list

- Account for the majority of federal jobs
- Open to the general public
- Eligible candidates compete and the best-qualified candidate, based on the job-related criteria, is selected

### Noncompetitive List – Civil Service Status

- Open only to current and former federal employees
- An applicant does not have to be the best-qualified applicant, he or she just has to meet the minimum qualifications

### Noncompetitive Appointing Authority

- An agency has the discretion to hire an individual who falls into one of the following categories: Veterans, people with disabilities, returned Peace Corps volunteers, Pathways Program applicants, VISTA members
- An applicant does not have to be the best-qualified applicant, he or she just has to meet the minimum qualifications

### Direct Hire

- Used when there is a shortage of qualified candidates, or when an agency has a critical hiring need, such as in an emergency
- Agencies are required to post their vacancies on USAJOBS, but to expedite the hiring process they do not need to apply veterans' preference or rank candidates. Once a qualified candidate is found, they can hire them.

## Exceptive Services

**A smaller portion of federal jobs are considered in the 'excepted service,' meaning that employees are hired by a more flexible procedure designed by the agency.**

### Exceptive Agencies

- All or some positions at an agency can be in the excepted service
- A few of these agencies include the Central Intelligence Agency, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and US Postal Service

### Exceptive Jobs

- Certain jobs or classes of jobs in an agency can be in the excepted service
- A few examples of commonly excepted jobs include attorneys, chaplains, and student trainees

# HOW GOVERNMENT JOBS ARE ORGANIZED

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## Occupational Series or Job Category

Occupational Series is another way that the Federal Government has tried to organize all of its different types of jobs across departments by a common series code. Within this system, all federal positions have a 4-digit code. For example, Park Rangers across all departments and agencies are linked together by a common code – 0025

## Grade

In most agencies, professional jobs are organized into one of 15 grades in a system called the General Schedule (GS). Each GS grade represents a particular level of difficulty and responsibility. Each job's grade is listed by the letters GS, followed by numbers, such as GS-1 (the lowest grade) to GS-15 (the highest grade). In our example, the grade of the position is listed as "03/05" (GS-0462-03/05). In general, you can follow the general guidelines when deciding which grade you qualify for:

- **Clerical GS-1 through 5:** Do not require a college degree.
- **GS-05:** Entry-level positions, straight out of college. Typically require a four-year course of study above high school .
- **GS-07:** Bachelor's degree (undergraduate with a GPA of 3 .0 and 1 year of relevant experience). Or one full academic year of graduate-level education.
- **GS-09:** Master's degree or two full academic years of graduate-level education.
- **GS-11:** Three full academic years of graduate-level education or a Ph.D.
- **GS-12 – GS-15:** Reserved for those with special skills. Experience is the primary factor for qualification.

# SEASONAL WORK

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## Why is seasonal work a good starting point for your career?

Seasonal employment with an outdoor agency offers people from all backgrounds the opportunity to experience close contact with nature and learn valuable job skills. With seasonal work you'll gain field experience that will enhance your qualifications for specific permanent positions. You will also develop valuable relationships.

## What are the chances to “upgrade” to a permanent position?

The chances to start as a seasonal employee and “move up” to become a permanent employee are very good. Though, it is not a straightforward path. Seasonal government employees are never guaranteed permanent positions, they often return for second or third seasons and it might take some time. But if this is passion, it is worth the effort.

## Special Promotion Opportunities

Some agencies provide programs to support seasonal employees to find a permanent position. For example, through the **Internal Merit Promotion Procedures** for Land Management agencies within the Department of Interior seasonal employees can be eligible to apply for positions reserved for permanent employees.

## Typical seasonal careers:

- Firefighter
- Forestry Technicians
- Maintenance workers

# WHERE AND HOW TO START

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## U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM)

The U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) acts as the federal government's human resources agency. Among other things, they manage federal job announcement postings at USAJOBS.gov, develop the job classification codes and pay grades, create self-assessment questions for job postings, and set policy on government-wide hiring procedures.

On their website, you can find information about federal employment trends, salary ranges, benefits, etc. The OPM also created the USAJobs ResumeBuilder in an effort to create a standard resume that could be used across government agencies.

### Other Job Portals:

- <http://www.conservationsjobboard.com/>
- <http://www.jobsfed.com/>
- <http://www.federaljobs.net/>

If you are interested in outdoor careers, there are different ways to find out if working with a government agency can be a step towards your dream career. Once you made the decision to apply it is time to learn more about how to apply at USA Jobs or other job portals.

## Homepages of Federal Agencies

If you haven't decided yet whether you want to work in the government sector or not, agency websites are a good starting point. You can find information what it means to work for the government, learn more about the agency and its mission.

## USAJOBS.gov

There is no way around USAJobs.gov. Most government jobs are listed here and the process to apply can be a time consuming and complicated. You can find guidance on the website or use the Guide "How to navigate the USAJOBS –site".



# WHAT YOU NEED TO APPLY: DO YOUR RESEARCH AND PREPARE

## USAJOBS: Steps to apply

The process of applying for a government job can be complicated and time consuming, but also very rewarding. Educate yourself about the steps and requirements as well as how to read job postings on USAJobs.gov. in order to succeed.

1. Setting up  
your profile

2. Resumes

3. Questions or  
Essays

4. Document  
Upload

USAJOBS – The Federal Official Jobsite <https://www.usajobs.gov/>

## Federal applications are composed of three parts:

Applying for a government job requires you to create a resume, cover letter, and to provide supporting documents according to government standards. It is important to fulfil all these standards to be considered for a government job.

### The Federal Resume

Choose from a previously saved resume or Create / upload a new resume

### Application Questionnaires

- Select which grade(s) you are applying
- Confirms you meet minimum qualifications
- Self- assessment questions

### Supporting Documents

- Proof of military service
- College transcripts
- Cover letter
- Proof of federal status

# “A FOOT IN THE DOOR”: SPECIAL PROGRAMS

As a high school or college student or recent graduate, the government offers additional opportunities to get real life experience and start making the first steps in your career:

## 1 National Internship Programs for Youth and other Federal Programs

- Youth Conservation Corps (ages 15-25)  
<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/youthprograms/ycc.htm>
- Department of Energy Student Programs <http://www.energy.gov/student-programs-and-internships>
- National Park Service Historic Preservation Internship Training Program  
<https://www.nps.gov/tps/education/internships.htm>
- The Student Conservation Association Career Discovery Internship Program  
<https://www.thесса.org/cdip>
- The Nature Conservancy Leadership in Environmental Action for the Future (LEAF) Program <http://www.nature.org/about-us/careers/leaf/>

## 2 Pathway Programs

“The Pathways Programs offer clear paths to Federal internships for students from high school through post-graduate school and to careers for recent graduates, and provide meaningful training and career development opportunities for individuals who are at the beginning of their Federal service.” – USAJOBS.gov

<https://www.usajobs.gov/Help/working-in-government/unique-hiring-paths/students/> .

The Pathways Program is composed of three programs:

- 1) the **Internship Program for current students**,
- 2) the **Recent Graduates Program** for people who have recently graduated from qualifying educational institutions or programs (two years from the date the graduate completed an academic course of study), and
- 3) the **Presidential Management Fellows (PMF) Program** for people who obtained an advanced degree.

## 3 VISTA AmeriCorps

VISTA stands for Volunteers in Service to America. It is an AmeriCorps program specifically aimed at alleviating poverty. VISTAs serve in various nonprofits across the country on the front lines of poverty doing various capacity building projects. VISTAs participate in indirect service.

<https://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/americorps/americorps-vista>

# Helpful Resume Websites, PowerPoints, and Videos

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## Websites containing information about how to obtain a federal job

- USAJOBS - <http://www.usajobs.gov>
- Work For Wildlife - <https://www.fws.gov/workforwildlife/>
- Government Job HQ - <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCKUAhcVpSpIkD0-pLYE4Lsw>

## Videos about Federal Resumes and USAJobs

- **Finding and Applying for Jobs in the Federal Government** - Published on Sep 12, 2014; 14:01 minutes -Learn how to search and apply for jobs with the Federal Government using USAJOBS, the main website for Federal employment information. Provided by USAJobs.gov OPM - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HY5Z\\_pfFUK4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HY5Z_pfFUK4)
- **Writing Your Federal Resume** - Published on Mar 12, 2012; 5:12 minutes - How to write a federal resume and how it is assessed. Provided by USAJobs.gov OPM - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8YX7o1PBoFk>
- **Make your Volunteer Experience Count**- Published on Nov 16, 2015; 3:10 minutes - In this video you will learn how to present relevant volunteer experience on your resume when you apply for Federal jobs. Provided by USAJobs.gov OPM - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BCCZSLkpYfc&list=PL8hc9yXSdAa-mqvl1YXxjvvcvWxL2n0x>
- **5 Tips for Communicating Your Qualifications** - Published on Aug 14, 2013; 3:16 minutes - Covers five tips for communication qualifications on a federal resume - Provided by USAJobs.gov OPM - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bqYkbnuiJU&index=11&list=PL8hc9yXSdAa-mqvl1YXxjvvcvWxL2n0x%20%20%20>
- **What Happens to My Resume When It's Sent to the Hiring Official?** - Published on Mar 28, 2013; 1:04 minutes - This video explains what happens when you apply for a Federal job and your resume is sent to the hiring official. Provided by USAJobs.gov OPM - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1\\_UyAODxbkA&index=6&list=PL8hc9yXSdAa-mqvl1YXxjvvcvWxL2n0x](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1_UyAODxbkA&index=6&list=PL8hc9yXSdAa-mqvl1YXxjvvcvWxL2n0x)
- **May I Apply If I'm Close to Completing My Degree?** - Published on Apr 8, 2013; 1:37 minutes - This video explains what happens if you apply for a Federal job based on your education and you are within the final months of completing requirements for your degree. Provided by USAJobs.gov OPM – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q1SNNTunbt4I&index=8&list=PL8hc9yXSdAa-mqvl1YXxjvvcvWxL2n0x>
- **Are All Federal Internships Under the Pathways Programs?** - Published on Feb 20, 2014; 1:21 minutes - This brief video explains where to look for Federal internships and answers a commonly asked question, Are All Federal Internships Under the Pathways Programs? - Provided by USAJobs.gov OPM - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-08vizl5eNU&index=5&list=PL8hc9yXSdAa-mqvl1YXxjvvcvWxL2n0x>
- **Three Steps to Get Referred to the Selecting Official for Government Jobs using USAJOBS** - Published on Dec 26, 2012; 8:35 minutes - Trying to break the code on how to apply for government jobs? Need to know how to make a Federal Resume? Provided by GovernmentJobHQ - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s8MGO8DC3Jw>

# Webinars and Presentations about Federal Resumes and USAJobs

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- \* - **The "Top Tips" for Successful Application to USAJOBS** - Published on Jun 28, 2012; 18:28 minutes - This is the sixth in a video series of "HOW TO SUCCESSFULLY APPLY TO USAJOBS." This video includes the top tips to overcome typical mistakes that prevent applicants from successfully applying for positions with the government. Provided by the Software Organization Development Office at Hiller Air Force Base - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y49d6wjbmXw>
- \* - **Resume Writing for USAJobs.gov** - Published on Jun 29, 2014; 55:19 minutes - We all know how difficult it is for military spouses to maintain and build a career. Many military spouses have found that working for the federal government is a great option. - Provided by the American Military Partner Association - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mpiApnJnQVc>
- \* - **Interested in Working for the Federal Government? Part 2: Learn How to Write a Federal Resume** - Published on Aug 15, 2014; 1:24:20 minutes - This video covers how to write a federal resume - Provided by the Corporation for National and Community Service (Americorp/Vista) - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=etsZvVJt\\_mU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=etsZvVJt_mU)

# Contact

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For further information please visit [MyTYO.org](http://MyTYO.org)



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