

Navigating Government Hiring – Part 1

Jennifer Tucker
September 2016

Agenda

- Welcome and Overview
- The Basics: Terms and Entry Criteria
- Overview: GS System
- How to Find Federal Jobs of Interest to You
- How Federal Job Announcements Are Created
- Navigating a USAJobs Announcement
- Stages of the Federal Hiring Process
- Essential Elements of a Federal Resume

The Basics: Terms and Entry Criteria

- Career Positions versus Political Appointments
- Career Positions: Start with USAJobs
- Which jobs are open to who:
 - Delegated case exam - "All US Citizens"
 - Merit promotion - Current Gov, Special Cases
- Special Hiring Authorities:
 - Veterans, Schedule A Disability, Peace Corp Grads

General Overview: GS System

- **GS:** General Schedule
- **Grades range from GS 1-15; vary slightly**
 - GS-5 - Administrative Clerk/Support
 - GS-6, 7, 8,9 -Administrative/Secretary
 - GS-5, 7, 9 - Recent Undergrad
 - GS-11, 12 - Mid-Level; Advanced Degree
 - GS-13 - Mid-Senior Specialist/Journeyman
 - GS-14 - Supervisor/Manager (Branch Chief, Deputy)
 - GS-15 - Manager (Division Director)
- Some agencies use special but comparable scales
- Above GS-15 = SES and SL/ST

General Overview: GS System

- **Grade** indicates level, salary range
- **Series** indicates type of expertise
- **Step** indicates level within grade (1-10) - New hires usually start at Step 1, increases each year
- **Code:** GS-2210-12/13
 - Information Technology Specialist, Grade 12 or 13
- **Why this matters:** Knowing your target series can help you tighten search, regardless of posted job title. Also helps manage salary expectations.

How to Find Federal Jobs of Interest

- Research USAJobs; on Twitter: @USAJobs
- Some Agencies post on LinkedIn
- Be broad in your search as you get used to postings:
 - Consider searching by agency to learn how positions are titled
 - Use broad terms that describe skills or activities in addition to titles
 - Public sector titles are different from private sector titles (Public Relations/Communications = Public Affairs or Outreach; Advertising/Business Development = Stakeholder Engagement; Business Management = Administrative/Program Analyst)

Pause Point

- SO, now you know how to search and find job listings, let's look more closely at how to READ them.

How Federal Job Announcements Are Created

- **Position Description** - Determines Role, Title, Salary, Series, Grade.
- **Primary Duties** - What the job responsibilities are
- **Specialized Experience** - What the person needs experience doing to be able to do the duties - **these are key selection criteria**
- **Questions**
- **Posting Parameters** - Defines applicant pool, posting period (often 5 days)

Navigating a USAJobs Announcement

- **Look for specialized experience:**
 - Your resume must explicitly describe what you have done that demonstrates that experience
 - Do NOT just repeat the text of the announcement
 - Be specific enough to be meaningful to Hiring Manager, while ALSO being recognizable to HR Specialist - tough balance!
- Look for **Selective Factor** - Must demonstrate explicitly to make it through screening
- **Questions:** Look for the highest level that you could justify in an interview with a straight face based on your understanding of the posted position.

Stages of the Federal Hiring Process

Job Posted and You Apply




HR Screens, Creates "Certificate"



Certificate Referred to Hiring Manager



Hiring Manager Screens Resumes,
Conducts Interviews (Phone, Panel, Final)



Offer and EOD (Entry on Duty)

Essential Elements of a Federal Resume

- Essential Elements = Whatever announcement requires
- Details Matter = What you did, not what was required
- 1-2 page resume does not apply
 - Early/Mid Career - 2-3 Pages
 - Mid/Senior - 4-6 Pages
- Recommend master resume with all your bullets - then, edit and reorder to fit announcement of interest
- Use verbs - what you did and achieved in terms recognizable to government (boosted sales = built stakeholder engagement)
- Two resume formats in USAJobs: Template, Upload

Other Points

- **Volunteer Experience Counts** - If substantial, list hours, roles just as you would a paying job - may help support higher grade determination.
- **Cover Letters** - Optional, but becoming more important. Recommend inserting before resume.
- **References** - Usually optional. Either include or stay silent. If you include, be sure the reference knows.
- **Attachments** - Check for required attachments, and include any optional ones that support your case (transcripts, performance evaluations, awards)

Ways to Check-In

- Monitor USAJobs for feedback - wait 4 weeks before checking in with HR contact
- If you are not referred and are genuinely surprised, ask for feedback - email HR contact on announcement
- Ask if they can provide any feedback on why you were not referred to the Hiring Official - be polite, avoid accusations
- If you feel really strongly you should have made certificate, ask politely is there is a reconsideration process or how you might appeal that determination
- Do not burn bridges with the HR contact. Period.

Final Points

- If all of this seems completely absurd, and you can't imagine having to slog through this kind of bureaucracy, you may want to rethink working for the Federal government.
- If you can make it through all this bureaucracy successfully, you can make a big difference as a public servant. **Service matters.**
- **Next Time:** Brief review of process for newcomers; focus on interview phase and how to navigate an offer.