

CHAPTER 7

Additional Considerations

Whether you're looking for your first job, or you're seeking a promotion, there are a few important things you should keep in mind as you go through the entire Government of Canada hiring process.

Length of time

It's no secret that the government hiring process is slow. The average length of time for an internal applicant to succeed in a job competition was 182 days in 2021-22. Yes, almost six months from start to finish – and that's 26 days less than it was the previous year. For external applicants looking to get into government for the first time, the average time is even longer, sitting at 227 days, or seven and a half months.^[25]

Applicants constantly bemoan the length of time it takes just to get a Letter of Offer, let alone their own cubicle, computer, and building badge. On the other side of things, hiring managers pull their hair out as they constantly lose excellent candidates to other companies or managers who are able to move things along a little faster. Although this timeline was deemed “unacceptably long” back in 2018 by the President of the Public Service Commission (the government agency responsible for protecting the integrity of hiring and promoting within the public service), this remains the standard.^[26] For reference, a “fast” process would be about three months.

It's important to go into the process with your eyes wide open. If you need a job ASAP to pay your bills, you should continue to apply for government jobs but perhaps try and get something at least part-time elsewhere for the 6+ months it'll

25 <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-service-commission/services/publications/annual-reports/annual-report-2021-2022.html>

26 <https://www.ourcommons.ca/DocumentViewer/en/42-1/oggo/meeting-143/evidence>

take for you to start the job. Plus, don't forget it takes another 2-4 weeks to receive your first paycheque once you actually start – and that's if everything goes right administratively. Plan accordingly.

Bilingualism

For those who are brand new here – this is a *big* topic in government. Everyone in Ottawa knows that bilingualism in Canada's two official languages is the biggest advantage you can have in the government – more so than any post-graduate degree. Not only is it one of the keys to getting in, it's also the key to moving up.

However, this is mainly geographical. If you're looking for a government job in certain parts of Ontario (particularly, of course, Ottawa), Quebec, New Brunswick, and a few select cities, you will need both English and French language skills to be a competitive candidate. In fact, almost all executive positions in Ottawa are technically supposed to be bilingual. However, if you live outside of these areas, you will be fine just speaking English. You can find the full list of designated "bilingual regions" [here](#).

Beyond geography, the other exception is technical skills. Jobs in the STEM fields generally do not require second language proficiency, partially because it is unlikely to be required during the course of the job activities, but also because these positions are targeting people with highly sought-after skills. Positions in engineering, biology, and IM/IT are often (but not always) exempt, as well as those related to finance or trades.

Positions relating to Indigenous affairs are also often exempt from the bilingualism requirement due to the recognition of barriers to entry as well as the presence and value of indigenous languages within Canada.

The Government of Canada uses the Second Language Evaluation (SLE) test to assess your second official language abilities with the following grade scale:

A = Basic comprehension

B = Intermediate comprehension (most individuals who have studied some French end up at a B level)

C = Strong and highly comfortable level of comprehension

Your assessment is valid for five years.

There are also three additional grades you may obtain:

X = Candidate does not meet the minimum requirements for an “A” in this language skill.

E = Candidate has demonstrated sufficient proficiency that they are indefinitely exempt from having to test for this language skill again. An “E” denotes that the candidate is expected to remain at a level C proficiency indefinitely. You will never find a position that *requires* an “E”, but if you have it, you’re free from test requirements forever.

P = Candidate had specialized language skills in the target language, normally acquired through specialized training. A “P” is normally used for positions that are focused on the language, such as professional translation, dictatyping, language teaching/testing. The regular SLE test is not used to evaluate for a “P” level.

You get one of the above grades for each of the 3 language skills: reading, writing and speaking. Your score is noted in that order. For example, if a job posting requires “CBC”, that means you need a “C” level in reading, a “B” level in writing and a “C” level in your oral communication skills. This combination of letters is known as your “language profile”. When you state that you are “CBC” (for example), you are letting someone know what your *second language* skills are; you don’t have a language profile for your first official language.

In the Government of Canada, and if you reside within a designated bilingual region, you will want to aim for a minimum language profile of “BBB” or greater. This is the minimum requirement for most entry-level positions in the government these days, especially in Ottawa. It’s important to note that the trend is currently leaning heavily toward an increase in bilingualism requirements for the public service. While 10 years ago most entry-level jobs were English Essential, they are

now increasingly BBB or even CBC. You won't find any positions that require an "A" level – at that point they would just ask for someone who is unilingual.

Apart from the language profile, another important thing to look at is whether a position is bilingual "imperative" or "non-imperative". "Imperative" means that you need to have the requested language profile by the time you get into the job. Conversely, "non-imperative" bilingual positions are open to individuals who are not bilingual at the time of the application, but are willing to learn.

If you take a non-imperative bilingual position, you commit to obtaining the level that is required of the position within a certain amount of time – normally 1 or 2 years. You sign a contract attesting to the fact that you will obtain this language level. Often these positions will come with paid language training, but it's not guaranteed. "Non-imperative" is used when the hiring manager is not confident that they'd be able to attract enough applicants just by requesting fully bilingual applicants, such as very senior executive positions or in sectors which are known to have a deficit of workers, such as in computer science or medicine.

If you didn't grow up speaking French (or English), this isn't a lost cause. There are a seemingly infinite amount of resources available to you to learn English or French, both free and paid. In addition, many public servants benefit from French training that is offered by their own department. This is another reason why it's important to take any government job you can get, even if it's at a lower level or not your ideal department.

You may be tempted to just download Duolingo and call it a day, but it's definitely worth investing (time) into government-specific language resources instead. SLE courses that are specifically made for the government make sure to cover language/topics typically used in public service work, which makes it more useful than typical language-learning programs like Duolingo or Rosetta Stone. The reason for that is because SLE testing in the government focuses on the skills you need to converse, write or read *at work*. They don't care much about whether you can ask where the bathroom is or how to order two beers. SLE-specific learning programs allow you to focus your energy on acing the government test.

Here are some helpful resources for learning your second official language for the purposes of a Government of Canada SLE test:

- Not sure what level your second language (French or English) skills are at? The Government of Canada offers online self-assessment tests for reading and writing. They're completely unofficial, but they can give you an idea of how far you still need to go, what kinds of courses you need to take, and what kinds of positions you should be looking at. The self-assessment tests can be found [here](#).
- Part of succeeding in an SLE is being able to anticipate the types of questions you will be asked so that you know how best to prepare. You can get information on the structure of the [oral](#), [reading](#), and [writing](#) exams to be able to anticipate this. There are also sample questions and guidance to help you out.
- There are various free services available to help you learn English or French. [Here](#) you can find an index of free language training (both general and job-specific training) services offered in your city. Simply type in your city, choose your service type, and you'll see hundreds of opportunities available to you. Many are focused on newcomers, but some are open to all.
- If you're already a government employee and are reading this book to seek a promotion or lateral deployment, the Canada School of Public Service is offered to all public servants. It includes tons of [really useful courses](#) to learn both official languages online.

The full gamut of official resources and information on second language testing in the Government of Canada can be found [here](#).

Inventories & Pools

One thing that some people find a bit peculiar in the government is the use of "Inventories" and "Pools". For positions identified as an inventory or a pool, you apply to one job poster but are eligible for multiple jobs.

Inventories are kept open for months, meaning that you can apply at any time and a hiring manager can pull your application at any time as well. If you are included in an inventory, it just means your application has been screened in but you are not yet found fully qualified for that position – you'll still have to go through at least an interview.

By contrast, pools encompass the entire selection process, so if you've found yourself included in a pool, that means you've been found to be qualified at that classification and level. At that point, managers looking for employees at that level can offer those candidates a position right away. The advantage of pools for hiring managers is that they're quick – the candidate has already gone through the months-long formal assessment process, so all they need to do is bring the candidate in for a short informal interview (typically to determine if they're a good fit for the team). Unlike inventories, pools actually close, so you have to apply by a specific deadline and other candidates can't be added to the pool after the application closes.

Inventories and pools are generally used for positions where an organization knows they will have to hire many candidates at that level, either because they've assessed their needs and see a ton of vacancies popping up, or because they're trying to address a job that has a high turnover rate. For example, HR often runs inventories or pools for Administrative Assistant jobs (e.g. AS-01/02), since there's so many positions open and people are often moving out of them to seek promotions.

Many candidates find it to be a major benefit to be qualified in a pool. Not only is their application exposed to multiple job opportunities at once, but it also allows other managers not affiliated with that specific pool to hire a candidate quickly. For example, if you are qualified in a PM-03 pool with, say, The Department of Exciting Things, and you know of a manager through your own network (from another department) that needs a PM-03, they can use the fact that you're in a PM-03 pool in the Department of Exciting Things to rationalize hiring you in their own PM-03 position. That way, they would avoid having to post up a job (that alone takes weeks) and then go through the screening process (on average another 6 months).

Rate of Pay

In Chapter 3, it was noted that all public service salaries are public information that can be found **online**. The pay scale is rigid and cannot be modified. Every year, from the date you are hired (your start date), you automatically go up by one “Step” until you reach the maximum. You can also see what the union negotiated as the pay rate for each year. Here is an example of the actual salary for all EC-03 positions since 2017:

EC-03 - Annual Rates of Pay (in dollars)

Effective Date	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5
S) June 22, 2017	63,428	65,236	67,044	69,375	71,769
X) Wage adjustment: June 22, 2018 1	63,935	65,758	67,580	69,930	72,343
A) June 22, 2018 1	65,214	67,073	68,932	71,329	73,790
Y) Wage adjustment: June 22, 2019 1	65,344	67,207	69,070	71,472	73,938
B) June 22, 2019 1	66,651	68,551	70,451	72,901	75,417
C) June 22, 2020	67,651	69,579	71,508	73,995	76,548
D) June 22, 2021	68,666	70,623	72,581	75,105	77,696

Many people ask if you have to start at Step 1, or whether you can negotiate to start at a higher Step. If you have years of experience performing the job at a similar level in a previous relevant position, you can mention this to the hiring manager and ask whether they would consider having you start at a higher Step. Usually, you need multiple years’ worth of experience performing the job at that level (not just in that field) to justify going even one step higher.

If you do this, you have to make sure you have very strong rationale to back up the pay increase, because it’s not a common practice. In addition, the hiring manager will usually receive substantial pushback from their HR unit, at which point *they* will need to provide a very strong rationale on your behalf. If the hiring manager responds that they are unable to consider a Step increase, you should take them at their word. They have likely consulted with HR and received a firm answer, so pushing them won’t do anything for you except possibly frustrate them before you even get to your first day.

The time to ask about your pay is not at the interview. At this point, you don’t have the position, and it could leave a bad taste in the interviewer’s mouth if you’re already asking about increasing your salary. Instead, you should do it once you have been offered the job but have not yet received your Letter of Offer. Once

that letter is signed, your contract is firmed up and that is the salary you have agreed to.

Geography

Another consideration to keep in mind as you apply is the issue of geography. Everyone knows Ottawa is the public service capital of Canada, but many don't know to what extent this is the case.

There are over 280,000 public servants across the country. Approximately 121,000 of them are found in the National Capital Region (Ottawa-Gatineau). In 2021-22, the National Capital Region hired 52.4% of all new public servants in Canada. Even when you eliminate the Ottawa-Gatineau region, Ontario still has the most public service positions out of the entire country, with just under 40,000. Next is Quebec, followed by BC, Alberta and Nova Scotia (in descending order).^{[27],[28]}

For this reason, political science and public affairs programs in Ottawa are strong, and attract many candidates; it's closer to the jobs they hope to one day have. If you live in Aurora, Ontario or Red Deer, Alberta, just keep in mind that it may not only take a little longer to get into a government job, but also that only certain departments are found in certain cities.

27 The full breakdown per province can be found here: <https://www.canada.ca/en/treasury-board-secretariat/services/innovation/human-resources-statistics/population-federal-public-service-geographic-region.html>

28 <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-service-commission/services/publications/annual-reports/annual-report-2021-2022.html>