Federal Job Search

Searching and applying for positions with the U.S. government

The official source of Federal job opportunities is the USAJOBS website: www.usajobs.gov. Start your search by reviewing the Info Center portion of this site. It includes an overview of the hiring process, a section for candidates who are new to federal service, tips on filling out applications, interviewing and even job search hints for maximizing your use of the website.

APPLICATION TIPS

It is important to note that application requirements and procedures vary across Federal agencies. Be sure to review the job announcement carefully for specific information on how to apply. Plan to spend substantial time preparing your application; your written description of your qualifications (KSAs) play a critical role in hiring.

KSAs are the job-related Knowledge, Skills, Abilities, and other characteristics that an applicant must have to perform successfully in the position. KSAs typically fall into two major categories – technical and behavioral.

• Technical KSAs measure acquired knowledge and “hard” technical skills, e.g., knowledge of accounting principles or the ability to create and manage Microsoft Access databases.

• Behavioral KSAs measure “soft” skills – the attitudes and approaches applicants take to their work, such as the ability to collaborate on team projects or the ability to communicate orally with a broad range of individuals.

Both types of KSAs are important for successful job performance and may be featured in job announcements. KSAs are listed in the “Qualifications and Evaluation” section of the job announcement. A typical job announcement contains three to five KSAs. You will be asked to respond to each KSA in writing – no more than one page per KSA.

Think of KSAs as written interview questions. The responses you write are your opportunity to tell about your experience, education, training, and self-development activities as they relate to each KSA. In developing your KSA responses, think about the CCAR formula:

• CONTEXT Describe the specific problem you had to address (What did you have to solve, resolve, respond to, handle, etc.)

• CHALLENGES Describe the factors that contributed to a particular challenge such as budget cuts, new legislation, institutional reform, new goals from upper management, etc.

• ACTION Describe the steps you took to solve the problem

• RESULT Outcomes of your actions—where possible, use numbers to highlight your accomplishment. Think time and money.

Other important tips to remember when answering KSAs include:

• Be specific

• Get to the point—don’t ramble

• Don’t borrow language from the job announcement

• Don’t describe what the team or group did, but what you actually did – use “I” not “we” when describing actions

• Avoid generalities and be sure to cite examples of similar work you have done and the result of your involvement
SAMPLE KSA: ABILITY TO COMMUNICATE IN WRITING

Example of a poor response:
• In my time as a student, I have written many, many papers and letters which often communicate terribly complex information for the edification of the readership. I am a good writer and have no trouble making sure that what I write says what I want it to.

Example of responses that convey specific information about an applicant:
• At the GS-5/7 level (Entry-Level Candidate): As an undergraduate student at the State University, I produced a minimum of five research papers each semester. These were technical papers that present and support a thesis statement, providing detailed documentation to justify my position. In my senior year, I produced a 25-page paper which explored the issue of public health systems in Europe and their possible application in this country. The paper received a grade of 98 and was published in the School of Public Administration’s newsletter.

• At the GS-9/11 level (More Experienced Candidate): For the past five years I have served as a free-lance writer, preparing text for publication in technical manuals, magazines, and other publications. I have written and edited materials in such subject areas as medicine, the arts, politics, and law enforcement. I conduct research and select the appropriate level of complexity for the target audience. In addition to the technical writing and editing that I have performed, I have published a collection of essays and several short stories. I am a member of the Writers Guild and have been a guest speaker for various professional writers’ seminars.

IMPORTANT GUIDELINES FOR APPLYING FOR A FEDERAL JOB

• Submit a neat, legible, typed application package;
• Check your application package for misspellings and typographical errors;
• Review your application package to ensure that it contains all of the required information listed under the “How to Apply” section of the job announcement;
• Be sure your application is submitted timely; and
• Do not submit an application package in a government, postage-paid envelope.

RESOURCES

USAjobs.gov: The government’s main job listing Web site: www.usajobs.gov

Federal Career Intern Program: Find full-time, entry-level positions with a two-year commitment at specific agencies by searching for FCIP openings; for general information, visit www.opm.gov/careerintern/index.htm

Presidential Management Fellows Program: Open to graduate students from all academic disciplines nominated by their institution: www.pmf.opm.gov


Partnership for Public Service: Nonprofit, nonpartisan organization promotes federal service and provides resources for students and colleges: http://ourpublicservice.org/

Visit the sites of agencies whose missions interest you most.