



## NAVIGATING THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S HIRING PROCESS

I'm often asked how to get job with the federal government and my answer is simple – understand and follow the process, be prepared, and be patient. The intent of this article is to outline the process and provide a few insights on how to successfully navigate the federal employment cycle.

According to the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM), there were almost 2.8 million federal employees in 2012, not including 1.55 million uniformed military members. Since this is a very large number, an organization of this size and scale must constantly recruit and hire new and talented employees. As a job seeker, this can represent a major opportunity depending upon your employment objectives.

There are many types of positions within the government, ranging from part to full-time, wage-grades (hourly employees) to salaried, and finally senior executive level positions. For the purposes of this article, I'll focus on a typical entry-level or mid-level position (GS-7 through 13). Government agencies do their own recruitment and hiring, however, OPM provides guidance and oversight of the process. I'll outline the general process in this article, however, there can be variations depending upon the agency, position, and hiring/appointing authority.

The process typically begins with a posting on the federal government's only job posting board called USAJobs ([www.USAJobs.gov](http://www.USAJobs.gov)).

If you're interested in a government position, I encourage you to visit this website and create an account. While there, you should indicate the types of positions and locations which are of interest to you. Once your account is created, you can begin searching for available positions and you should utilize the following OPM video tutorial to help get started: ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=ahg1fseIvMg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ahg1fseIvMg)).



Once you've identified a position of interest, you'll need to complete an on-line application and submit all required documentation such as transcripts or proof of veteran status during the period of advertisement. The website will help you build a resume or you can upload your own in word or pdf format. You can have up to 5 resumes on file and

I highly recommend that you tailor each resume to the specific position of interest. The key is to align your resume to the position using the key words included in the advertisement. An important item to mention at this point regarding resumes submitted through USAJobs is that while resumes for industry positions should be no longer than 2-pages, government resumes can be as long as necessary.





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In-fact, we encourage you to add all relevant information which aligns to the position of interest and highlights your knowledge, skills, and prior experience. Having a lengthy resume is acceptable and may actually increase your chances of advancing in the hiring process. For some entry level positions, the hiring authority might be able to extend an offer based upon the resume alone. This means the more information you have related to the position (your knowledge, skills, and prior experience) the greater your chances will be for getting the job without an interview. For mid-level positions, hiring managers or selecting officials might prefer to interview several candidates before making a decision. This brings up an important point that many job seekers don’t fully understand – a government interview can be different from an industry interview.

The OPM guidance indicates that federal government interviews will be structured, meaning that all candidates will be asked the same questions in the same order. In addition, the selecting official(s) will have specific criteria by which they evaluate candidates. The interview will typically begin with brief introductions, an outline of the process, and how much time you’ll have to respond to questions. After this, the questions will begin. During the questions phase, don’t be alarmed if there’s limited or no direct

feedback as the selecting official(s) might look at their scoring criteria and take notes most of the time.

Don’t let this lack of interaction distract you! Unlike an industry or corporate interview, which can be more conversational, a structured interview can be regimented and feel less personal. Don’t allow this to impact your interview – stay focused and answer the questions asked with as much relevant information as



possible. Also, use the allotted time for the interview. The key in this process is to communicate as much relevant information regarding your knowledge, skills, abilities, and prior experience in the allotted time. Your answers should provide as much information as possible and have a logical flow. Don’t provide an abbreviated answer when you have additional materials that are relevant. However, don’t ramble and talk about non-related information. Take a piece of paper with you, pause before answering, write a few notes, and then answer.



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On occasion, the selecting official may provide the written questions before your interview. In this case, utilize the time given to ensure you communicate the most relevant information when the questions are asked. At the end of the questions, you'll typically be asked if there's anything else you'd like to tell the selecting official(s) or if you have any questions. This is an important part of the interview since you might be able to go back and re-address previous questions. If you do this, make sure you identify which question you're going to re-address. In some cases, selecting official(s) might allow your comments to be credited in their final summary. Interviews can be done in-person or via phone; regardless of the format, the same principles apply. Once the interview is over, remember to thank everyone.

At this point, the waiting begins and notification of selection depends upon many things such as the agency, location, and position – timing can range from days to months. Don't interpret the lack of contact to mean that you're not competitive, it's just how the process works. However, don't sit around and avoid interacting with other potential employers during this period if you're unemployed, especially in the current job market.

The federal government is a great employer if you get the chance to compete and are selected for a position. Realize the hiring process can be complex, confusing, and doesn't necessarily align with how industry hires. Understanding and following the process is important and typically begins with a visit to USAJobs. There are other routes to government employment not



covered in this article and other nuances that we couldn't address with limited space. The OPM website provides a wealth of information regarding the employment process and we encourage you to visit this site for more details. ([www.opm.gov](http://www.opm.gov))