

Ten Tips for Federal Government Applications



1. Know where to look – USAJobs.gov

- USAJobs.gov is a one-stop shop for federal job openings, descriptions, benefits and how to apply. State-level government jobs are listed elsewhere, e.g., oregon.gov/jobs for Oregon. Read up on the application process at usajobs.gov/Help. **Take time to educate yourself before applying; the process is competitive and not intuitive.**

2. You must demonstrate each requirement from the position posting.

- Being vaguely qualified doesn't cut it on federal applications. They do not read between the lines. You must show how you meet all of the qualifications and skills that are marked as required.
- **Print out the job description and highlight every required skill or ability. Then type out your résumé sections to match them, checking them off as you go. Submit unofficial transcripts to prove educational credentials.**
- **Reverse chronological format is easier** than functional résumés for HR officials to match up your skills. They separate applicants into 'doesn't meet minimums,' 'minimally qualified' and 'best qualified.' You might be minimally qualified, but not advance to interviews, so be thorough and bold about your accomplishments.
- **Be explicit.** If 'Microsoft Word' is a requirement, you must list it. If a required skill is 'Oral Communications,' talk about the class presentations or work briefings you've given.
- **Unpaid/volunteer experience is considered.** Use your volunteering, class projects, courses, clubs, leadership, etc. to build out your experience. Always include numbers of hours worked in paid and unpaid positions.
- **Be honest, not modest.** If wavering on whether to check 'no' on a supplemental questionnaire, err on the side of 'yes.' Don't self-select out if you are in the ballpark of the qualification. Your résumé should back up your questionnaire answers with evidence.

3. Federal résumés are longer than private sector résumés, typically 3-5 pages.

- Federal résumés must include everything that would be discussed in an interview written down. They prove your qualifications in depth and show not just what you did, but how you did it and the results you produced (e.g., analyzed 1,000 samples and made a recommendation to senior officials). One-page résumés are at a disadvantage.

4. Tailor your application to each position.

- Don't upload the same résumé for many jobs. Use keywords and phrases from the job description in your explanations. Be specific and quantify results (e.g., Developed numerous sensitive training courses for nearly 1,500 personnel. Rated as the number one instructor over 20 peers in annual performance report.)

5. Fill out your online profile/résumé in advance.

- **Federal job openings are often only posted for five days.** Fill out your profile because 1) you can set search preferences so that relevant jobs are sent straight to your inbox, 2) you can fill out the bulk of the information in your résumé so it's easy to tweak and apply on short notice. You can store up to five résumés on USAJobs.gov.

6. Use the online résumé builder instead of your uploaded résumé.

- You'll be more likely to thoroughly address all aspects of the application if you use the USAJobs Résumé Builder versus uploading your own résumé. Fill out all fields, including 'optional' if possible. **Information like hours worked at previous jobs, GS level, supervisor name/number are usually required. Previous salaries may be optional. List your high school and diploma received date, too.** You can then download and reformat the résumé in Word if preferred.

7. Start early. Federal application processes can take a while.

- Hiring can be slow and full of steps (e.g., gaining security clearances). You can plan on 1-4 months from application to hire date. Start applying in the fall and winter for summer positions. Apply before the closing date in case the agency has a cut-off number of applicants they are accepting. **TIP:** Most job posts close at 11:59 p.m. ET, that's 8:59 p.m. PT.

8. Find out if you're a preferred candidate.

- Check the job description for whether you qualify for a 'special hiring authority.' Groups of people like those with a disability, veterans, Peace Corps/AmeriCorps volunteers, etc. may have an advantage for certain jobs.
- Did you know that one third of applicants hired for federal jobs in 2014 were veterans? If you served in the military, your application may get extra preference. Visit fedshirevets.gov for more info.

9. Gain an advantage through networking.

- There's no way to circumvent the USAJobs.gov application process, but your application may rise to the surface if someone on the inside knows your work. Make connections! Attend the agency's workshops, volunteer, connect with alums on LinkedIn who work there, get to know your local recruiter or call the hiring manager to introduce yourself and ask good questions regarding a specific job. Personal contact can increase your odds. Also it's a good idea to follow up (in moderation) after your application and ask about the status of interviews. Or, if you don't get hired, ask for feedback on your application for next time.

10. Check out USAJobs Pathways Programs for students and recent grads.

- Pathways internships are offered at many federal agencies and are a great way to get experience as a current student or a recent graduate (who graduated in the past two years/six for veterans).
- These programs provide individualized mentorship and the possibility of being hired full-time afterward.
- The Presidential Management Fellow Program is for students with advanced degrees.

EXAMPLE

Julienne Carrots

111 Orange Food Way, Blacksburg, VA 24061
(444) 444-4444; jcarrots@oregonstate.edu

EDUCATION

B.S. in Horticulture; Option in Plant Breeding @ Genetics June 2016

Oregon State University, Corvallis, OR
GPA: 3.5 on a 4.0 scale; 120 Semester Hours

Diploma, Canby High School June 2012

Canby High School, Canby, OR; GPA: 3.8 on a 4.0 scale

WORK EXPERIENCE

Horticultural Research Technician

Virginia Tech Horticulture Department, Blacksburg, VA
Supervisor: Mr. Rick Celery. (555) 555-5555
Permission to contact supervisor? Yes

Oct. 2016 – Jan. 2018
Hours per week: 40
Grade Level: N/A
Salary: \$48,000

PLANT BREEDING: Developed and executed a growing strategy for 50 species of ornamental plants under the leadership of faculty director. On a daily basis monitored water, nutritional and temperature needs of plants. Evaluated trials based on form, growth patterns and survivability of species. Submitted patents for two newly developed species of *Cotoneaster horizontalis* and *Hibiscus rosa-sinensis*. Partnered with five local nurseries for plant evaluation and received highly positive feedback.

PERSONNEL SUPERVISION: Extensive experience managing 15 undergraduate student workers and giving direction for key tasks in the growing program. Provided performance feedback, hiring and daily management.