

# Tips for Federal Résumés and Applications

## 1. KNOW WHERE TO LOOK.

**USAJobs** 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](https://oregon.gov/jobs) for Oregon. Read up on the **application process** or take a **training**. Take time to educate yourself before applying; the process is competitive and not always intuitive.



## 2. YOU MUST DEMONSTRATE EACH REQUIREMENT FROM THE JOB 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 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.**
- 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.
- **Be honest, not modest.** If you are wavering on whether to check “no” on a supplemental questionnaire, err on the side of “yes.” Don't self-select out if you think you are in the ballpark of the qualification.
- Include things like your high school diploma, your college credits (indicate semester or quarter hours), your salary (hourly or yearly), number of hours worked at previous positions—not typical in other types of résumés.
- **TIP: The federal government outlines minimum coursework requirements for many specific job titles.** Visit the 'Classifications & Qualifications' section of the Office of Personnel Management website ([opm.gov](https://www.opm.gov)) to make sure you are taking the right grad courses. For state jobs, investigate requirements on individual agency websites.

## 3. FEDERAL RÉSUMÉS ARE LONGER THAN PRIVATE SECTOR, TYPICALLY THREE TO SEVEN 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 JOB.

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 number one instructor over 20 peers in 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**.

## 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. You can then download and reformat the résumé in Word if preferred.

## 7. START EARLY. FEDERAL APPLICATION PROCESSES CAN TAKE A WHILE.

Hiring is full of steps (e.g., gaining security clearances). You can plan on 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 such as those with a disability, veterans, Peace Corps/AmeriCorps volunteers, etc. may be more likely to get an interview for certain jobs. Visit **fedshirevets.gov** for more info if you are a veteran.

## 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, mention contacts in your cover letter, connect with alums on LinkedIn who work there, get to know your local recruiter or call the hiring manager to introduce yourself and ask questions. 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 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 grad 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.