



PLEASE READ ALL INSTRUCTIONS THOURGHLY WHEN APPLYING FOR A JOB

Questions and Answers

This page can be found on the web at the following url:

<http://www.opm.gov/employ/students/fedhire.asp>

**U.S. Office of Personnel Management
Ensuring the Federal Government has an effective civilian workforce**

New to the Federal Government FAQs

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Q1: Where can I find information about Federal jobs?

A. USAJOBS is the official job site of the United States Federal Government. This Website, <http://www.usajobs.gov>, is the centralized site for most Federal agencies to post vacancy announcements. At any given time, there are approximately 20,000 positions posted on the site. Additionally, many agencies also advertise in newspapers of general circulation, participate in job fairs, and recruit on school campuses.

Q2: How does USAJOBS work?

A. Federal agencies are responsible for posting job vacancy announcements on the USAJOBS Website. Vacancy announcements for agency positions are posted for a specific period of time and indicate a closing date. Application procedures and application time periods differ based on agency practices; it is important to review application information included in the announcement for each position in which you are interested.

<http://www.opm.gov/employ/students/fedhire.asp>

Q3: What is a vacancy announcement?

A. Federal vacancy announcements are the means by which an agency advertises its vacancies. Job vacancy announcements describe position information including the title, salary, duties, qualification requirements, closing date, and application procedures. There is no universal format for vacancy announcements: each agency creates and manages announcements independently, so you should carefully review each section. Announcements are removed from the USAJOBS Website on the closing date; therefore, you are encouraged to maintain for future reference a copy of announcements to which you apply.

Q4: What is a closing date?

A. The closing date is the last day you can apply for the job. The vacancy announcement will specify the acceptance period for electronic submissions or, if a hard copy is required, whether or not your application should be either received or postmarked by the closing date.

Q5: What does “area of consideration” mean?

A. The area of consideration describes the individuals from whom the agency will accept applications to compete for the position. It may be a broad or a limited group of individuals. The area of consideration may also be referred to as “Who May Apply” within the vacancy announcement. If you are not within the area of consideration and you are not eligible for a non-competitive or special hiring authority, the agency will not consider your application.

Q6: How do I apply for a Federal position?

A. Each vacancy announcement on USAJOBS, regardless of format, includes a section with application directions called “How to Apply.” Since application procedures vary across agencies, it is important you follow the directions provided within each vacancy announcement. You will be directed to use an on-line application program or fax all or part of your application. Go to the “What to do if I cannot apply online” to download the requested fax cover sheet and for the fax number. In such instances, you may need to provide additional documentation such as college transcripts or verification of veterans’ preference by fax for your application to be considered complete. The USAJOBS website provides a “Create a Resume” feature. You can create your own resume or the OF-612 (Optional Application for Federal Employment) form is the Federal Government job application and can be accessed at:
http://www.opm.gov/forms/pdf_fill/of612/pdf.

Q7: Is there still a civil service “test” or “examination”?

A. There is no single civil service “test” covering all civil service positions. To apply for many Federal jobs you do not have to take a traditional paper and pencil test. The vacancy announcements on the USAJOBS website will indicate if a specific written test is necessary. Otherwise, you should refer to the vacancy announcement to obtain information regarding how qualifications and abilities are evaluated.

Q8: What does it mean when the vacancy announcement’s Who May Apply section says “all sources” or “status applicants” and/or “reinstatement eligible’s”?

A. These are groups of individuals the agency may identify as groups from which it will accept applications to compete for its vacancy.

When a vacancy is open to “all sources”, it means anyone may apply. While there are no restrictions on the groups of candidates who may apply to these types of announcements, in most cases, U.S. citizenship is required. In rare cases, agencies may hire certain non-citizens when there are no qualified U.S. citizens available, unless the appointment is prohibited by statute. In addition, Congress frequently restricts agencies’ ability to hire non-citizens into the excepted service as well, through appropriations provisions.

“Status applicants” refers to those individuals who are current or former Federal civilian employees who hold or held non-temporary appointments in the competitive service, not the excepted service.

NOTE: Certain veterans eligible under the Veterans Employment Opportunities Act (VEOA) may also apply and be considered under vacancy announcements limited to status candidates. For information on VEOA eligibility, please visit:

http://www.opm.gov/veterans/html/vetguide.asp#Veterans_Employment_Opprtunities_Act_of_1998.

Reinstatement eligibility refers to the ability for those individuals who previously held a career or career-conditional appointment to apply for jobs in the competitive Federal service open to status applicants. There is no time limit on reinstatement eligibility for those who either have veterans' preference, or acquired career tenure by completing 3 years of substantially continuous creditable service. For more information on reinstatement, please visit: ~

Q9: What are the special appointing authorities some agencies include in their vacancy announcements?

A. Special appointment authorities may be used by agencies to appoint specific groups of individuals who meet the respective eligibility requirements to positions in the Federal Government.

The following are a few examples where special appointment authorities may be used.

Federal hiring officials are authorized to use a special appointment authority when considering certain people with disabilities (e.g., those with mental retardation, severe physical or psychiatric disability). Use of this authority is at the discretion of each agency. Individuals may contact agency Special Placement Program Coordinators (SPPC) to inquire about opportunities under this authority. SPPC contact information can be found by visiting: http://apps.opm.gov/sppc_directory?. For more information on Federal employment for people with disabilities, please visit: <http://www.opm.gov/disability/appempl.asp>.

Veterans Recruitment Appointment (formerly known as the Veterans Readjustment Appointment or VRA): the VRA is an excepted appointment, made without competition, to positions otherwise in the competitive service. Use of the authority is entirely discretionary, and no one is entitled to a VRA. This special authority allows agencies to non-competitively appoint a qualified covered veteran to any position for which he or she is qualified up to a GS-11 or equivalent. Upon completion of two years of satisfactory service, the covered veteran is converted to the competitive service. For more information on the VRA, including eligibility requirements, please visit: <http://www.usajobs.opm.gov/E14.asp>.

30% Disabled Veterans: Federal agencies have the authority, by law, to give a non-competitive temporary or term appointment of not less than 60 days to any veteran who has a compensable service-connected disability of 30% or more and who meets the qualification requirements of the position. Like the VRA, this authority is discretionary with the agency. To be eligible, the individual must be a disabled veteran who has a compensable service-connected disability of 30% or more officially documented by the Department of Defense or the Department of Veterans Affairs. For more information on this hiring authority, please visit: <http://www.opm.gov/veterans/html/vetsinfor.asp>.

Q10: For which positions may I apply?

A. If you have no prior Federal civilian service and are not eligible for any special appointing authority, you may only be considered for announcements which are open to the public or all sources or U.S. citizens. If you meet the criteria for a special appointing authority, you may apply under that authority as well; however, you may have to submit separate applications if you

wish to be considered under more than one appointment authority. Each vacancy announcement will include qualification criteria outlining the minimum education or experience requirements an applicant must possess to be considered qualified. Follow the instructions provided in the “How to Apply” section of each vacancy announcement. You will be competing against other applicants based on the information provided in your application and job-specific question responses; therefore, you must ensure you provide a complete and accurate explanation of your experience and qualifications.

Q11: Do I have to be a US citizen to apply?

A. Under Executive Order 11935, only United States citizens and nationals may be appointed to competitive service Federal jobs. In rare cases, agencies may hire certain non-citizens when there are no qualified U.S. citizens available, unless the appointment is prohibited by statute. In addition, Congress frequently restricts agencies’ ability to hire non-citizens into the excepted service as well, through appropriations provisions. For more information about citizenship requirements, please visit: <http://www.usajobs.opm.gov/E19.asp>.

Q12: How can I find out for which positions I am qualified?

A. Vacancy announcements will include the qualification requirements, such as education and/or experience, license requirements, etc. You should review the vacancy announcement to determine whether you meet the requirements for the position.

Q13. Can OPM review my resume/application to determine for which positions I am qualified?

A. OPM has delegated most of its examining authority for competitive service positions to agencies. This authority includes making qualification determinations for agency jobs. The hiring agency evaluates your application against OPM-issued minimum qualification requirements (e.g., related work experience, education, licensure, if required) to determine your eligibility for the advertised position.

Q14: What are qualification standards?

A. Qualification Standards are a description of the minimum requirements necessary to perform work of a particular occupation successfully and safely. These minimum requirements may include specific job-related work experience, education, medical or physical standards, training, security, and/or licensure. They are not designed to rank candidates, identify the best qualified for a particular position, or substitute for an analysis of an applicant’s knowledge, skills, and abilities/competencies. The qualification standards for white collar occupations are in the *Operating Manual: Qualification Standards for General Schedule Positions*. To review the *Operating Manual* please visit: <http://www.opm.gov/qualifications/index.asp>. For information about the Job Qualification System for Trades and Labor Occupations, please visit: <http://www.opm.gov/qualifications/x-118c/index.htm>.

Q15: If I am found to be qualified, will I get an interview?

A. Agencies develop their own procedures for interview practices. The decision to interview may depend on a variety of factors, including your ranking against other candidates, the number of positions being filled, and the number of people who applied.

Q16: How long will it take before I hear my results?

A. The time it takes to be contacted to schedule an interview or to be notified of non-selection for a position may vary. Agencies have a 45-day timeline goal for hiring, and OPM has developed a 45-day hiring model to increase efficiency in the hiring process. The model focuses on a series of recommended steps from the date the vacancy announcement closes until the time an offer is made to a candidate. OPM holds agencies accountable for the degree to which they achieve the 45-day goal, but the goal is not legally binding upon the agency and confers no particular rights on applicants. It is recommended you maintain the vacancy point-of-contact information so you can obtain the status of your application and the position for which you applied.

Q17: How does the Federal pay system work?

A. For white-collar employees, basic pay is usually set under the General Schedule (GS), which is adjusted annually. Employees in GS positions in the continental United States also receive locality pay (there are 32 defined locality pay areas). Employees outside the continental United States in non-foreign areas (i.e., Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands) do not receive locality rates, but rather receive cost-of-living allowances. Vacancy announcements include pay ranges for the advertised positions. The current salary tables for the GS and locality pay areas are available at <http://www.opm.gov/oca/06tables/index.asp>.

For blue-collar employees, basic pay is set under the Federal Wage System (FWS). There are 132 appropriated fund and 125 non-appropriated fund local wage areas. For current FWS rates, please visit: <http://www.opm.gov/oca/wage/Wagesch.asp> and select a state and county for the corresponding wage schedule.

White-collar and blue-collar employees in certain occupations and/or geographic areas may receive special rates. Special rates are higher rates of pay than GS and locality rates.

Some agencies have statutory authority to administer their own pay systems. Employees in these agencies are compensated through alternative pay systems established by their employing agency.

Q18: What will my salary be?

A. There are 15 grades in the General Schedule (GS) pay system; each grade has 10 steps. Upon your first appointment to a GS position, you will typically be placed in the first step of the grade for which you are selected. Occasionally, exceptions can be made for applicants with hard-to-find or highly desirable skills. These exceptions are at an agency's discretion and are not an employee entitlement. (Some agencies have statutory authority to administer their own pay systems. Employees in these agencies may be subject to different pay-setting rules.) Current GS salaries may be viewed at: <http://www.opm.gov/oca/06tables/index.asp>. In certain situations, agencies, at their discretion, may offer recruitment, relocation, or retention incentives. Information on recruitment, relocation, and retention incentives is available at: http://www.opm.gov/oca/pay/html/3RS_newQAs.asp.

The Senior Executive Service (SES) includes most managerial, supervisory, and policy positions classified above GS grade 15 or equivalent positions in the Executive Branch of the Federal Government. Compensation for SES positions is based on a pay-for-performance system. For additional information, please visit: <http://www.opm.gov/ses/compensation.asp>.

Q19: What does GS, WS, WG, YA, VN etc. mean in a position's title?

A. Positions within the Federal Government are classified by occupational series, grade or pay level, and pay plan. Pay plans identify the pay system under which the position is covered. Many white-collar employees are paid under the General Schedule (GS), which is regulated by title 5 and administered by OPM. GS positions, including other white-collar positions, are paid annual salaries. Current GS salaries may be viewed at: <http://www.opm.gov/ses/compensation.asp>.

Blue-collar employees are paid under the Federal Wage System (FWS). FWS positions are craft, trade, and laboring positions and include several different pay plans (WS, WG, WL, etc.). FWS positions are paid on an hourly basis. For current FWS rates, please visit: <http://www.opm.gov/oca/wage/Wagesch.asp> and select a state and county for the corresponding wage schedule.

Some agencies have statutory authority to administer their own pay systems. Employees within these agencies may be paid under separate pay systems (e.g., pay bands) with separate pay plan codes. For instance, the YA pay plan is used only by the Department of Defense for positions classified under the National Security Personnel System (NSPS). The VN pay plan is specific to nursing positions within the Department of Veteran Affairs. Because of variations in the independent personnel systems across the Federal Government, it is recommended applicants contact the hiring agency directly to obtain definitive information about pay plans other than the GS.

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