

Unlocking Opportunities: Navigating the Federal Job Search Maze

Host: Raelynn Grasso, Ph.D.

Moderator: Kimberlee Wambua, MA

January 27, 2026



UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND
GLOBAL CAMPUS

AGENDA

- Introductions
- Rules of Engagement
- Why Work for the Federal Government?
- Understanding the Federal Job Process
- Federal Application & Hiring Processes
- Resources & Tips
- Upcoming Events
- Q&A

RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

- ❑ This session will be recorded and may be publicly redistributed to social media and other communication channels.
- ❑ You will be sent the recording and slides via email within 24 hours after the session.
- ❑ We will not be using the raise hand and Q & A features, please post your questions in the chat, and we will answer those questions during Q & A at the end of the presentation.
- ❑ When posting questions in the chat, please post them to everyone and not just to the host and panelists, we want to make sure that everyone can see the questions asked.
- ❑ By attending this event you acknowledge that you are here to gather information, and attendance does not guarantee employment.
- ❑ This is a professional webinar so please be mindful of the comments that you post in the chat.
- ❑ **THANK YOU** again for joining us!

Why Work for the Federal Government?

- Federal employees can address important issues that can impact the world
- Challenging and interesting work
- Benefits are competitive with private and nonprofit sectors
- Many opportunities for advancement; automatic step pay increases
- Flexible work schedules promoting time off and work/life balance
- Jobs for every major
- Ability to transfer agencies without having to start over
- Federal opportunities are world-wide

Understanding the Federal Job Process

- Federal job searching requires a **DIFFERENT RESUME STYLE** and involves a **DIFFERENT PROCESS** than the conventional job search.
- The federal hiring process is complex **AND** understanding the hiring process increases your chances of **SUCCESS!**
- **The process is slow...very SLOW!**

Understanding the Federal Job Process

1. USAJobs (usajobs.gov) is the official site to find and apply to most federal jobs
2. Federal Resumes are *different* than the private sector
3. Job Announcements have key sections and must be addressed in your resume
4. It is important to understand the General Schedule (GS) pay grade levels
5. Answer questionnaires, strategically but honestly
6. Understand that certain applicants have preference
7. Most jobs will require some sort of background check
8. Resumes need to be tailored for *each* position
9. Unfortunately, rejection is normal!

Federal Application & Hiring Process

Below is a quick summary of how the application process works when you use USAJobs to apply for positions:

1. You will need to create an account with Login.gov to get started
2. Create a profile on USAJobs.gov
3. Build a Federal Resume
4. Review job announcements/Search for jobs
5. Prepare your application materials
6. Submit application to agency
7. Agency reviews application
8. Interview
9. Agency selects candidate
10. Job offer is made to successful candidate

Let's Walk Through the Process



UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND
GLOBAL CAMPUS

1. Create an Account with Login.gov

USAJOBS

You must agree to USAJOBS's terms and conditions.

This is a U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) federal government computer system that is for authorized use only. Authorized uses include: job searching, applying for jobs, updating and completing a USAJOBS profile, managing documents and other standard uses available to all users on USAJOBS.gov. All communications and data on this system (including data transiting, traveling to or from, or stored) is subject to monitoring. By using this system, you consent to the monitoring, interception, recording, and searching of all communications and data on this system at any time and for any official purpose by OPM or by any authorized person or entity, including other government entities or law enforcement authorities. Unauthorized use of the system is prohibited and is subject to criminal and civil penalties. Your acknowledgment and consent covers all use of the system, including work-related use and personal use without exception.

Privacy Act statement

The Privacy Act may apply to the information you provide to USAJOBS.

- The authority to collect your information includes 5 USC Chapter 33 Subchapter I Part III Subpart B—Examination, Certification and Appointment.
- The main purposes for collecting your information are to help connect you to federal jobs and review your applications for those jobs.
- OPM may disclose information that can identify you for reasons including: to determine whether to hire or retain you, for legal reasons, to respond to a Congressional inquiry if you request one, for record keeping, to address a suspected or confirmed breach, and to contractors and other staff hired by OPM to accomplish the purpose of this collection.
- Providing this information is voluntary but needed to apply for federal jobs via USAJOBS.

The system of records notice for this collection is OPM GOVT—5, Recruiting, Examining and Placement Records. The full text, including a complete list of where your information may be disclosed is available on the [OPM privacy website](#).

Go back

Agree

Federal Positions may be posted elsewhere, but USAJOBS is the main gateway



An official website of the United States government [Here's how you know](#) ▾

LOGIN.GOV | **USAJOBS**



USAJOBS is using Login.gov to allow you to sign in to your account safely and securely.

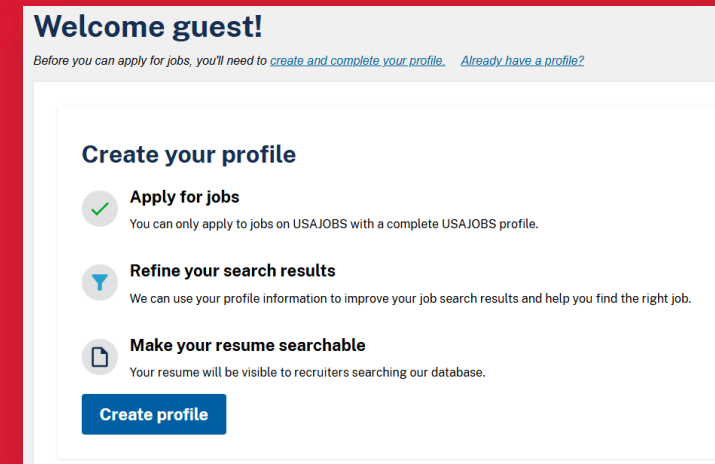
[Sign in](#) [Create an account](#)

2. Create a Profile on USAJOBS

Once you create your **Login.gov** account, you need to create a profile on **USAJOBS** before you can apply to jobs.


You will be asked to provide the following information:

- First and Last Name
- Street Address
 - Country
 - City or Town
 - State
 - Postal/Zip Code
- Phone Number
- US Citizenship Status
- Federal Service (e.g., have you worked for the federal government before)
- Military Service




Tip: You can also make your resume and profile searchable. Making your resume searchable adds it to the USAJOBS resume bank. HR specialists and hiring managers from federal agencies use the resume bank to look for people to fill their job vacancies.

2. Additional USAJobs Profile Details

 An official website of the United States government

What you can do next

-  **You've created your profile!**
You can now apply for jobs, upload or build a resume, sign up for alerts and more.

Add a resume to your profile

You can upload your own resume or use our resume builder tool to create one online. You can add up to five different resumes.

[Upload a resume](#) [Build a resume](#)

Get noticed by agency recruiters

Once you add a resume to your profile, make it searchable. Agency recruiters can view your profile and resume when it's searchable. They may reach out to you if your skills and experience match the jobs they're looking to fill.

[Make your resume searchable](#)

Sign up for notifications about jobs

You can sign up for email or text alerts, save a job search or sign up for recruiter emails.

[Sign up for notifications](#)

Complete your profile's optional information

Filling out all the optional information can improve your job search results. It may also help agency recruiters find you if your resume is searchable.

[Complete your profile](#)

Provide military service information

If you're a veteran or a family member of a veteran, answer a few questions to see if you're eligible for veteran's preference or a special hiring authority.

[Answer military service questions](#)

Upload your SF-50

If you're a current or former federal employee, you will need to provide your SF-50 when you apply to a job. Upload your SF-50 to the documents section of your profile so it's always ready to go.

[Upload SF-50](#)

3. Build your Resume on USAJOBS

Federal Resumes are Built Differently!

They include:

Job Title

Employer

Start/End Dates (Month/Year)

Hours worked per Week

Salary (Often Required)

Supervisor Contact Info – Or “May Contact”

Build a resume

[Save progress and return to documents](#)

Resume name *

Raelynn Resume 1-22-2026 [Update resume name](#)

① Relevant work experience

List your work experience here

[Add work experience](#)

I do not wish to provide work experience

② Education, certification or licensures

Complete work experience to begin this step

③ Job-related training (optional)

④ Language skills (optional)

⑤ Professional publications (optional)

⑥ Additional information (optional)

[Complete resume and preview](#)

💡 Tip: Write your Federal Resume focused on the job announcement and **NOT** as a general resume

💡 Tip: Improper formatting of your Federal Resume, and not following all specified guidelines, are the top reasons applications get **rejected!!!**

3. Resume Requirements on USAJOBS

[Resumes](#) [Other documents](#)

Add a resume to your profile

You can have up to five resumes in your profile.

You must upload or build a resume that is two pages or less and meets all requirements listed in the job announcement.

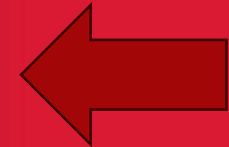
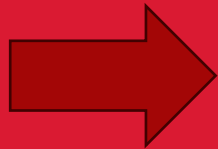
[Upload a resume](#) [Build a resume](#)

Why build a resume on USAJOBS?

- You can create a resume tailored to the job you want to apply to.
- You can duplicate and edit your resume to easily customize it for different jobs.

Make your resume searchable

If you make your resume searchable, your profile is automatically searchable too. Recruiters can match your background with the jobs they're looking to fill.



3. Resume Requirements on USAJOBS

Help

Resume builder will help you create a resume. Customize your resume for the job you plan to apply for and read the entire job announcement to understand the qualifications.

A few tips

- You can copy and paste from a Word file, but it's best to save a Word file as .txt first to prevent formatting issues.
- Save your work as you go.
- You can duplicate and edit a resume made in the builder to customize it for different jobs.

Resumes limited to two pages

Federal agencies now only accept resumes up to two pages in length.

Additional Requirements & Specifics

What should I not include in my resume?

- Classified or government sensitive information
- Social Security Number (SSN)
- Photos of yourself
- Personal information, such as age, sex, religious affiliation, etc.
- Encrypted and digitally signed documents

What file types can I use?

Your resume must be 5 MB or less. We recommend saving and uploading your resume as a PDF to maintain formatting and number of pages. We also accept GIF, JPG, JPEG, PNG, RTF, TXT, ODT or Word (DOC or DOCX). We do not accept PDF portfolio files. Use a standard 8.5x11-inch size for your document.

We recommend using a sans-serif font size like Lato, if available. Other recommended options are Calibri, Helvetica, Arial, Verdana, Open Sans, Source Sans Pro, Roboto or Noto Sans. Make your page margins 0.5 inches. Consider using 14-point size font for titles and 10-point for the main text in your resume.

What's required in a federal resume?

Check the job announcement to see if there is more required information to include in your resume.

- Contact Information – your name and the best way to contact you.
- Relevant work experience – include the employer's name, job title, start and end dates (month/year), the number of hours worked per week and describe how you meet the required qualifications of the job. Federal jobs should include series and grade.
- Education, certifications or licensures – If the job announcement requires any education, certifications or licensures, include the required information. If required, include school or institution name, completion date, degree type and GPA.

4. Search for Jobs on USAJOBS

- Now that your profile is set up in USAJOBS, you can begin to search for positions
- Use the search box at the top of the home page, or click on the “search icon” at the top of any page and the search bar will appear
- Within USAJOBS, you can search by:
 - Keyword
 - Locations
 - Filters

4. Review Job Announcements

- If you find a job that you are interested in, read the entire announcement to make sure you are eligible and you meet the qualifications
- For each job there are specific qualifications. Your application *must* show how you meet the required qualifications
 - ✓ Read the "This job is open to" section to see if you are eligible to apply
 - ✓ Read the "Clarification from the agency", or the "Who may apply" sections for further eligibility details. Keep in mind that not all job announcements may include this information
 - ✓ Read the "Qualifications" section to see if you meet the job's qualifications
 - ✓ In essence, understand the job announcement!

4. Tips for Analyzing Announcements

Follow the Directions & Read everything!

- ✓ Most people will fall into 1 or 2 occupational series, maybe 3
- ✓ **“80% Rule”** - Carefully review the vacancy announcement language, particularly under the “Duties” tab. Look for an 80% match between the listed duties and your skills. If not, the job is likely not a good fit for you
- ✓ There are usually 6-8 core skills required for each job classification. To help identify them, look for the **verbs** and **bulleted** information

Print out the vacancy announcement, highlight keywords and requirements.

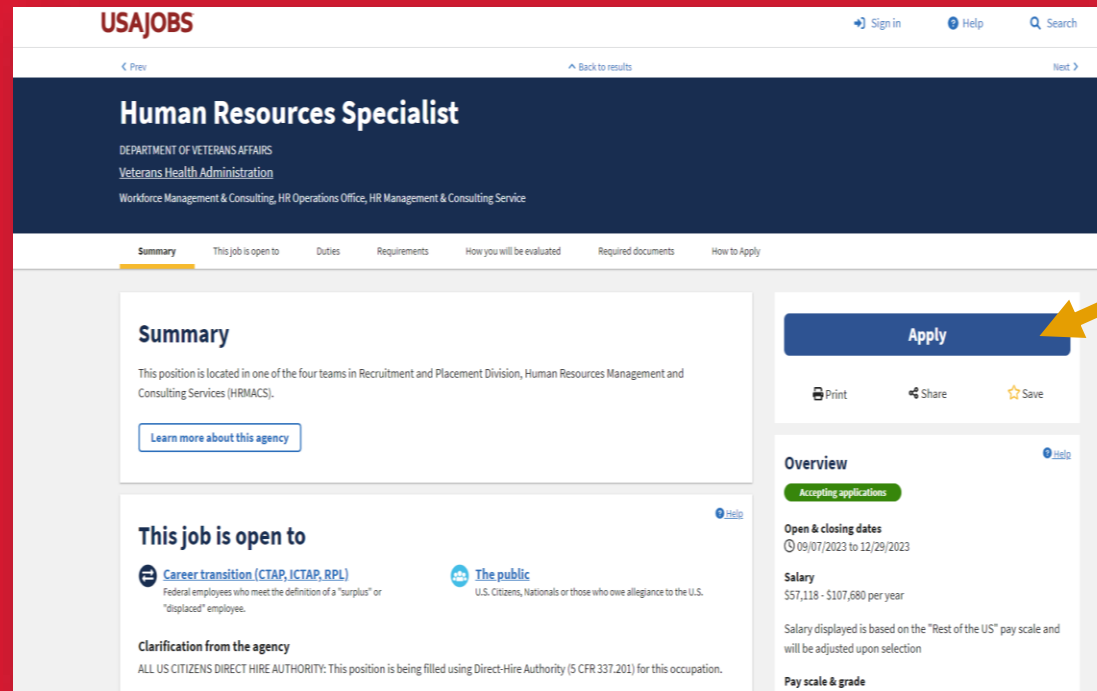


Be sure to incorporate those words and phrases in your resume!



5. Prepare your Application in USAJOBS

- Read the **How to Apply** section of the job announcement
- Click **Apply** to start your application



6. Submit Application to Agency

When your application is ready in USAJOBS, you will be directed to the agency application system where you can submit your application. Before you submit, you *may* need to complete other agency-required steps like:

- Providing more personal information
- Providing more documentation
- Answering eligibility questions
- Completing an occupational questionnaire, look for a preview of the questions under the Required documents section



Tip: You can always check the status of your application in your USAJOBS profile with the Track This Application link

7. Agency Reviews Application

- Once the job announcement closes the hiring agency will start reviewing applications
- Qualified applicants will be placed into two categories:
 - Minimally qualified
 - Highest qualified
- Only the highest qualified applicants will be sent to the hiring official

8. Interviews

- It may take some time to schedule interviews, depending on the number of people being interviewed
- The hiring official will only review the highest qualified applications and select applicants to interview based on agency policy
- Interview may consist of - Panel, In-person, Video, or Phone
- There may be more than one interview round

9. Agency Selects Candidate

- Once all interviews are completed the agency will select a candidate(s)
- For those not selected, the hiring agency will update the job status to Hiring complete
- If the hiring agency does not fill the position, the job status will update to Job canceled

10. Job Offer

- The hiring agency will extend a tentative job offer
- Once this offer is accepted by the candidate, the agency will start the background investigation
- The job offer is final when the agency successfully completes the background investigation and any additional security checks
- The hiring agency will contact the candidate(s) directly to set up a start date















Things to Know



UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND
GLOBAL CAMPUS

Explore Hiring Paths

The federal government offers unique hiring paths designed to recruit individuals who reflect our nation's diversity. Learn more about each hiring path and determine your eligibility.

 Base facilities and land management agency Current or former employees of a base management agency.	 Family of overseas employees Family members of a federal employee or uniformed service member who is, or was, working overseas.
 Federal employees Current or former federal employees in the competitive or excepted services.	 Individuals with disabilities Individuals who are eligible under Schedule A.
 Military spouses Military spouses of active duty service members or whose spouse is 100 percent disabled or died on active duty.	 National Guard & reserves Current members, those who want to join or transitioning military members.
 Native Americans Native Americans or Alaskan Natives with a tribal affiliation.	 Open to the public U.S. citizens, nationals or those who owe allegiance to the U.S.
 Peace Corps & AmeriCorps VISTA Individuals who have served at least 2 years with the Peace Corps or 1 year with AmeriCorps VISTA.	 Recent graduates Those who have recently graduated from a qualifying educational institution or career or technical program.
 Senior executives Individuals looking for an executive level job and who meet the five Executive Core Qualifications (ECQs).	 Special authorities Individuals eligible under a special authority not listed above, but defined in the federal hiring regulations.
 Students Current students in high school, college, trade school, graduate school or other qualifying educational institutions.	 Veterans Veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces.

Understanding Grade Levels & Pay

Federal jobs use the General Schedule (GS) or similar systems

GS levels roughly map to experience. For example:

- GS-5/7: entry-level
- GS-9/11/12: mid-level
- GS-13+: senior/managerial

Many jobs are career ladders (e.g., GS-7 → 9 → 11 → 12).

Salary depends on:

- Grade + step
- Locality pay (city-based)

 You must qualify at the grade you apply for, not “learn into it.”

Understanding Grade Levels & Pay

- Know which position titles and grade levels are appropriate for you
- Grade level can be based upon experience, education or a combination of both
- Determining grade by education only:
 - GS-4 – Two years above high school (or AA Degree)
 - GS-5 – Based on Bachelor's degree
 - GS-7 – One full year of graduate study or Bachelor's degree with superior academic achievement
 - GS-9-11 – Master's degree or equivalent
 - GS-14 and above – Ph.D.

Federal Government Agency & Position Titles

Why is it important to know your target agency and job title?

- Job titles in the federal government differ from private industry
- Many job titles have specific education and experience requirements
- Some job titles change across agencies and departments
- Agencies may have varying hiring processes

Excepted Agencies

If you are interested in working for an **excepted** agency, check their website for the agency's hiring process

- Some government entities are **excepted** and are not *required* to follow OPM rules or post positions on USAjobs.com
- Search "*excepted agencies*" for a complete list
- Certain positions may also be excepted for various reasons.
 - e.g., – Lawyers, seasonal and part-time workers, internships

Major Excepted Service Departments & Agencies:

- Federal Reserve System, Board of Governors
- Central Intelligence Agency
- Defense Intelligence Agency
- U.S. Department of State
- Federal Bureau of Investigation
- General Accounting Office
- Agency for International Development
- National Security Agency
- U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
- Post Rates Commission
- United States Postal Service
- Tennessee Valley Authority
- United States Mission to the United Nations
- Judicial Branch & Legislative Branch

A Word about Questionnaires

- Federal positions often have a required questionnaire where applicants must rate their own professional experience using a series of position and skill related questions.
- The questionnaire provides clues to the most important position requirements.
- Preview the questionnaire when evaluating a position for “fit,” and to help determine which key skills to emphasize in the resume.

A Word about Questionnaires, cont.

- Many candidates **ELIMINATE THEMSELVES** with the questionnaire before their resumes are even read!
- Be **LIBERAL** with your responses
- It is important to respond with the **HIGHEST** possible answer
- **DO NOT BE OVERLY MODEST!**

For Example:

1. *I have performed this task as a regular part of a job. I have performed it independently and normally without review by a supervisor or senior employee.*
2. *I have expertise in this area, supervisors or others come to me with questions.*

REMEMBER...

Your Federal Resume is basically your Job Application

Your resume will be **evaluated and scored** resulting in the following category:

Not Qualified

(Minimally) Qualified

Highest Qualified

Only a certain number of the “Highest Qualified” applications are
“Referred” to the hiring manager for possible interview

Apply, Apply, Apply!

- You have to be **persistent** and **consistent** about applying for Federal jobs. It can take dozens (or more) of applications and anywhere from 3 to 18 months to get an interview with a hiring manager.

-
- Follow all directions on the vacancy announcement
 - Know the deadline/closing date and then apply early
 - Know that it is **OK** to follow-up... and you should!

Stay Up-To-Date

New Resume Length Requirements:

<https://help.usajobs.gov/faq/application/documents/resume/page-limit>

Additional Information:

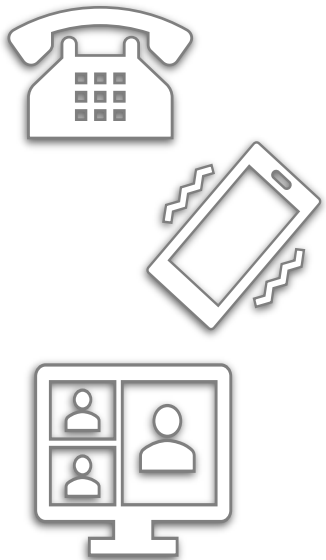
<https://help.usajobs.gov/faq/application/documents/resume/what-to-include>

Need Additional Assistance?

Make an appointment with a **Career Advising Specialist**



To make an appointment, log in to your CareerQuest account, then navigate to **Connect -> Advising**, or use this link: <https://careerquest.umgc.edu/hub/umgc-careerquest/advising/people>



Note: Whether you make a phone appointment or a video appointment, be sure to follow the reminder notifications for how to join the meeting within CareerQuest. You will be sent either a,

- phone number and a PIN, or a
- video link

As a reminder, Career Advisors join the meeting through the CareerQuest system and **do not** call out directly.

Upcoming Events

Event card for "GET NOTICED: RESUME TIPS FOR CAREER FAIR SUCCESS". The card features a blue header with "FEB" and the date "10". The main title is "GET NOTICED: RESUME TIPS FOR CAREER FAIR SUCCESS". Below the title, the event details are: "Get Noticed: Resume Tips for Career Fair Success", "Tuesday, Feb 10, 2026 7:00pm - 8:00pm EST", and "Zoom Webinar". A "Webinar" tag is present at the bottom left, and a green "Register" button is at the bottom center.

Event card for "UNLOCK YOUR CAREER PROVEN STRATEGIES FOR JOB SEARCH SUCCESS". The card features a blue header with "FEB" and the date "24". The main title is "UNLOCK YOUR CAREER PROVEN STRATEGIES FOR JOB SEARCH SUCCESS". Below the title, the event details are: "Unlock Your Career: Proven Strategies for Job Search Success", "Tuesday, Feb 24, 2026 7:00pm - 8:00pm EST", and "Zoom Webinar". A "Webinar" tag is present at the bottom left, and a green "Register" button is at the bottom center.

<https://careerquest.umgc.edu/hub/umgc-careerquest/events>



QUESTIONS?

Additional Questions?

Give us a call or send us an email!

(240) 684-2720

careerservices@umgc.edu



We want to hear from you!

Please leave your thoughts, comments, or feedback:

[Webinar Survey Link](#)