



UNITED STATES OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT
Washington, DC 20415

The Director

April 25, 2022

Memorandum for Chief Human Capital Officers

From: Kiran A. Ahuja
Director

Subject: Second Chance Month

On March 31, 2022, President Biden issued a [proclamation designating April as Second Chance Month](#), reaffirming the importance of helping people who were formerly incarcerated reenter society. Securing stable employment is a key component for successful reentry, and the Federal government, in its role as the Nation's largest employer, takes seriously its commitment to assist in this effort. America is at its best when qualified individuals with diverse perspectives—including formerly incarcerated individuals—come together to meet our greatest challenges.

The U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM), the lead human resources agency of the Federal government, is committed to advancing these values to develop a strong Federal workforce. Fundamental to this commitment is outreach to and recruitment of formerly incarcerated individuals—because we know that qualified individuals, despite past criminal records, not only deserve a second chance, but also have much to offer the Federal government.

In recognition of Second Chance Month, we are issuing the attached Guide to Federal Employment for Second Chance Applicants, which contains helpful information about the Federal hiring process and how the rules apply to Second Chance applicants. We are also offering webinars on Monday, April 25 and Wednesday, April 27, 2022, for formerly incarcerated individuals and job seekers on employment topics and providing resources to facilitate their understanding of the Federal hiring process. Information on these sessions is available at <https://www.usajobs.gov/Notification/Events>.

To assist Federal agencies reaching this talent pool, OPM will offer virtual briefings on recruiting strategies and hiring authorities available to appoint them on Thursday, April 28, 2022. To register click here <https://secondchance.eventbrite.com>. Please contact the Recruitment Policy and Outreach group at recruitment@opm.gov for additional details.

We look forward to working with you to advance the goals of the Administration both in enhancing the federal workforce and in making it possible for formerly incarcerated individuals to improve their lives through every avenue available, including employment.

Attachment: Guide to Federal Employment for Second Chance Applicants (see 508-conformant pdf below)

cc: Deputy CHCOs, Human Resources Directors

UNITED STATES OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT

Guide to Federal Employment for Second Chance Applicants



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Message From The OPM Director

As the Nation’s largest employer, the Federal government takes seriously its commitment to draw upon talent from every segment of society. The reason is simple: we are at our best when qualified individuals with diverse perspectives come together to meet our greatest challenges.

The Biden-Harris Administration and the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM), the lead agency in Federal human resources, are committed to advancing these values to develop a strong workforce. Fundamental to this commitment is outreach to and recruitment of formerly incarcerated individuals—because we know that qualified individuals, despite past criminal records, not only deserve a second chance, but also have much to offer the Federal government.

This *Guide to Federal Employment for Second Chance Applicants* is intended as a resource to achieve these goals. It offers helpful information on navigating USAJOBS (the main Federal employment portal), writing a resumé for the greatest impact when applying for Federal employment, and preparing for and participating in interviews. Also, this Guide provides important information for formerly incarcerated applicants, and a chart that identifies special hiring authorities that can serve as paths into Federal public service.

We encourage formerly incarcerated individuals, regardless of experience and academic background, to bring their skills and talents to Federal service. And we are connecting with partners and community-based organizations to share information with formerly incarcerated individuals about Federal job opportunities.

We look forward to working together to continue our efforts towards a more diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible Federal workforce, and ultimately a stronger Nation.

Kiran A. Ahuja

Understanding Eligibility and Qualifications for Federal Jobs

1. What is eligibility?

In the Federal hiring process, eligibility refers to being part of a particular group of people that an agency wants to hire, whether it is a current Federal employee, a veteran, or a recent graduate. There are different eligibilities in the Federal Government; we call them hiring paths. For example, some jobs are only open to current or former Federal employees. This means you must be a current or former Federal employee to be eligible. Other jobs may only be open to current students or recent graduates, and some jobs are open to the public. Visit www.usajobs.gov to learn more about the hiring paths.

Before you apply

As an applicant, refer to the “This job is open to” or “Who may apply” section of the job announcement to review the hiring paths which help to determine your eligibility. If you do not fall into any of the listed hiring paths, you are not eligible for that job and should look for other job opportunities on www.usajobs.gov. For example, some jobs are open only to current employees of the Federal government, so if you are not a current Federal employee, you would not be eligible.

After you apply

The hiring agency will first review your application to see if you are eligible for the job. If you are not eligible, no matter your level of qualifications, the agency will not be able to consider your application for that position. You must be deemed eligible to be considered for the job.

2. What are qualifications?

Like any other employer, the Federal Government expects its employees to be well qualified for the jobs they hold. Qualifications include your work experience (skills, education level, and knowledge of a particular field) or training. The hiring agency will review your qualifications after they determine your eligibility. They are typically expressed in terms of job-related experience or education, (e.g., course credit hours) or a combination of the two. They may also be expressed as proficiency levels on a competency-based assessment. The applicants who do not meet the minimum qualification requirements for the position receive no further consideration.

The “requirements” section of the job announcement describes the type of experience you need, certain conditions of employment you need to agree to for the job, and how the hiring agency will evaluate your application. It is important that you read the entire section. Some job announcements include multiple requirements.

3. How do I know if I am qualified?

The purpose of qualifications review is to identify those applicants who are likely to perform successfully on the job and to screen out those who are unlikely to do so.

Before you apply

Whatever your background has been, you could be minimally qualified for many different jobs, and highly qualified for some. Review your qualifications against the requirements stated in the job announcement. Your resumé must show that you have the general and/or specialized experience, education, and/or other qualifications listed in the job announcement.

After you apply

If you are eligible for the job, the hiring agency will review your qualifications. Applicants who meet eligibility and minimum qualification requirements or who meet minimum qualifications and then attain minimum proficiency levels on a competency-based assessment (get a “passing score”) move past the assessment phase of the hiring process. Agencies may choose to use one or more assessment methods to evaluate eligible candidates. The hiring agency will notify applicants if they meet the qualification requirements.

4. What if I do not have a degree?

Most Federal positions do not require a college degree. If you are just starting out, you can qualify for jobs at the lower grade levels with general experience or a combination of education and general experience. General experience does not necessarily relate directly to the position but demonstrates the ability to acquire the necessary competencies to perform the work of the position. Starting at the General Schedule (GS) 5 grade (or equivalent) level, positions generally require one year of specialized experience as described in the job announcement. At higher grade (or equivalent) levels, additional work experience is required. There are lower grade positions in the Federal Government that do not require any specialized work experience.

If you have been working for a while, you may be well-qualified for many positions, even without a college degree. The nature of your experience is what really counts. Applicants can qualify for most Federal occupations based on job-related work experience.

When experience is an element of qualification for a position in the competitive civil service, a *preference eligible veteran* (see explanation below) is entitled to credit—

- 1) for service in the armed forces when that service interrupted civilian employment similar to the job for which the veteran is applying; and
- 2) for relevant experience gained in religious, civic, welfare, service, and organizational activities, including as a volunteer.

5. What jobs do require a college degree?

Most Federal positions do not require a college degree. Jobs requiring a college or graduate level degree tend to involve research, scientific, or professional work (such as positions in acquisition, medicine, engineering, biology, psychology, or accounting). Some positions require a college degree with a major field of study or specific academic courses at the bachelor's or graduate level. The hiring agency provides information about educational requirements in the job announcement. You may be able to qualify for a particular job using only a degree, progress towards a degree, a combination of education and experience, or just by experience if the degree completed is related directly to the work of the position.

To be acceptable, all college level courses must have been completed at an accredited (or with pre-accredited status) college recognized by the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education. You may find this information by going to www.ed.gov.

6. What is Veterans' Preference?

Veterans' preference refers to a hiring preference given to qualifying veterans and, in certain cases, family members. As a preference eligible veteran, you may receive preference over non-veteran applicants in the hiring process. Veterans' preference can be used when applying to permanent and temporary positions in both the competitive and excepted service (of the executive branch).

For additional information visit <https://www.fedshirevets.gov>

7. How are well-qualified job applicants distinguished from minimally qualified ones?

If you meet eligibility and minimum qualification requirements, the hiring agency will invite you to the assessment phase of the hiring process. Agencies may choose to use one or more assessment methods to evaluate eligible candidates.

Applicants for competitive service positions are generally rated and ranked using a category rating system. (Agencies may also request permission to use the traditional "rule-of-three" method by which candidates receive numerical scores and are then placed in rank order by their scores, augmented by veterans' preference points. In that method, the agency must select from among the top three candidates unless there is a proper and adequate reason to select someone else.)

Under a category ranking selection process, candidates are placed in broader quality categories such as "Best Qualified", "Well Qualified", and "Qualified." Names of all eligible candidates in the highest quality category are referred on the Certificate of Eligibles to the selecting official for consideration.

- Hiring official selects from among candidates in the highest quality category
- Veterans' preference applies but operates differently from the mechanism used under the rule of three. Preference eligibles do not get points added to a numerical score; instead, with a significant exception discussed immediately below, they are placed in the quality category that applies to them and will be listed ahead of non-preference eligibles within that quality category.
- Important exception: In the case of a qualified preference eligible with a compensable service-connected disability of 10 percent or more who has applied to a position other than a scientific and professional position at the General Schedule level 9 or above, the preference eligible is listed in the highest quality category.

The agency cannot pass over a preference eligible veteran to select a non-preference eligible in the same quality category, without a proper and adequate reason.

Refer to the section “How You Will be Evaluated” in the job announcement for specific information.

8. What are the qualification requirements for trades and crafts jobs?

Trades and crafts jobs have a separate qualification system from white collar positions. Applicants for apprenticeship programs for the various trades must demonstrate the potential to succeed in the job and the ability to complete classroom and on-the-job training. For journeyman or senior level jobs, applicants for trade jobs (for example, electronic equipment maintenance, electricians, plumbers, and carpenters) are rated against competencies (commonly known as job elements) that are required for successful performance. Each trade has one or more critical job elements that applicants must meet to be rated basically eligible for the job. To be qualified, applicants must demonstrate mastery of the specified job elements through work experience, training, or tests.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Can I work for the Federal Government if I have a criminal record?

Generally, yes. The Federal Government employs people—including some who may have criminal records—who possess the requisite knowledge, skills, and abilities. Agencies generally are required to make tentative selections from among the highest-rated candidates who can comply with the requirements of the position. These candidates can include people with criminal records.

Some specific laws or statutes prohibit employment, depending on the crime committed or type of position involved. For example:

- Certain Federal laws, like those prohibiting treason, carry with them a lifelong ban on Federal employment.

- The Bond Amendment imposes restrictions related to certain national security clearances, absent a waiver ([50 USC 3343](#)).
- People convicted of misdemeanor domestic violence crimes under Federal or State law are prohibited from employment in any position requiring the individual: to ship, transport, possess, or receive firearms or ammunition (18 U.S.C. 922(g) and (h))

2. When would I be asked about any criminal history?

For most Federal jobs, questions about your criminal history do not appear on the initial application. However, if you receive a tentative offer of employment, you will need to complete a Declaration for Federal Employment (OF 306) and undergo a background investigation to establish your suitability or fitness for employment. It is important that you are truthful during the application process and provide all the required information about your criminal record when you apply to a Federal job.

3. How will agencies use information about my criminal history?

Generally, upon tentative selection, individuals will be subject to personnel vetting. Personnel vetting includes having a background investigation that provides the basis for a decision about one's suitability or fitness for employment and one's eligibility to be issued a personal identity verification (PIV) credential that permits access to government facilities and information technology systems.

When evaluating your past criminal history record information, Federal agencies may consider the following:

- Potential conflicts between your criminal conduct and the core job duties or the mission of the agency.
- The nature, seriousness, and circumstance of your criminal activity.
- How long it is been since your criminal activity.
- Rehabilitation or efforts toward rehabilitation.

Depending on the type of position, personnel vetting may also include a decision regarding one's eligibility to hold a sensitive position or have access to classified information. The job announcement should specify the type(s) of determination(s) that is required for the job.

For more information about the standards and how these determinations are made, visit the following websites:

- Suitability standards: visit www.ecfr.gov and search for Title 5, Part 731

- Standards for Issuing a Federal Credential:
<https://www.opm.gov/suitability/suitability-executive-agent/policy/final-credentialing-standards.pdf>
- National Security standards:
<https://www.odni.gov/files/NCSC/documents/Regulations/SEAD-4-Adjudicative-Guidelines-U.pdf>

4. How do I address gaps in employment due to incarceration or unemployment?

Periods of unemployment have no impact on your eligibility for a Federal job as long as the eligibility and minimum qualifications for the position are met. Employment gaps on your resumé will not impact your eligibility or qualifications for a Federal job. There is no requirement to address employment gaps or reasons for leaving previous positions in your resumé. You may be asked questions about your employment history during interviews. You need to be prepared to generally address employment gaps and reasons for leaving previous positions.

If you are formerly incarcerated and have gaps in your employment history, you may:

- Include in your resumé the skills you learned, certifications or degrees you earned, or jobs you held while incarcerated.
- Consider including experience you gained doing volunteer work, community work, or freelance work. You can include specific examples of activities and responsibilities you had during your employment gap that are relevant to the duties or responsibilities of the position you are applying for.

Refer to the section on writing your resumé and interview tips for additional information. If selected, you may be asked to provide additional information about your employment history in connection with a background investigation.

Federal Application Process

This is a summary of how the application process works when you use USAJOBS to apply for positions.

1. Create Your USAJOBS Account and Profile

USAJOBS is the official website for Federal Government employment. With a USAJOBS profile, you can customize your job search and apply for Federal jobs. You can search for jobs without an account but creating one early in the process will enhance your job search experience.

To create an account:

- Select **Create Profile** or **Sign In** on the USAJOBS Home Page, which will take you to LOGIN.GOV.
- Choose **Create an account** to begin the process.
- Enter your email address (use an email address that you have regular access to), then select **Submit**.
- Follow the instructions to finish setting up your account. You will be prompted to set up an additional authentication method for a second level of security. If you have a mobile phone, text messages are easiest because you can receive them immediately. The Face or Touch Unlock method requires that you use a device (phone, computer) that allows for facial or fingerprint recognition. You will need to provide your additional authentication to access your USAJOBS account.
- Once you have successfully created your Login.gov account, you will be sent back to the USABJOBS sign-in page.
- Once logged in, your USAJOBS account home page will appear. Select **Create Profile** and follow the prompts to complete your profile. Be sure to include any hiring paths (e.g., individuals with disabilities, students and recent graduates, open to the public, veterans, Native Americans, etc.) in which you are eligible. If you are not certain about your eligibility, go to the USAJOBS homepage and select the hiring paths to learn more about definitions and eligibility requirements for each.

We recommend you select **Preferences** (e.g., work location, appointment type and schedule, etc.) and fill out the optional fields. Then, select **Save Preferences**. USAJOBS can use this information to improve your job search results.

2. Create/Upload A Resumé

You can create or upload up to five different resumé and upload 10 supporting documents (e.g., student transcript, cover letter) to use when applying for Federal jobs. The USAJOBS Resumé Builder is helpful if you do not currently have a resumé. The Resumé Builder will help you create a resumé using step-by-step instructions.

- When logged into your USAJOBS account, select **Documents** at the top of the page and then **Resumé**.
- Select the plus icon to build or upload a Resumé.
- Select **Build Resumé** or **Upload Resumé** from the pop up and follow the instructions.
- To upload a transcript or other types of documents, go to Documents, and select Other.
- Choose the document type to upload (e.g., transcript, cover letter), name the document, and then select **Complete Upload**.

You may choose to make your resumé searchable, which adds your resumé to the USAJOBS resumé bank. The human resources specialists and hiring managers from Federal agencies may use the resumé bank to look for people (with a searchable resumé in their USAJOBS account) to fill their job vacancies. When your resumé is searchable and you have completed your profile, your profile is also searchable. You can make your resumé searchable by clicking **Documents**

and then **Resumés**. Click the **Searchable** button on the resumé you would like to make searchable.

3. Search for Jobs

Start your job search by typing in a keyword or location. Use the search filters to narrow your results by hiring path, salary, work schedule, agency and more.

You can search for jobs anytime. However, it is best to create and sign into your profile before doing a search because USAJOBS can use your profile information to improve your job search results.

Save your job search. You can save a job search to help you look for jobs in your area of interest. When you save a search, USAJOBS will automatically look for jobs that match what you are looking for and email you, daily, weekly, or monthly with those jobs. [Learn how to save a search.](#)

4. Review the Job Announcement

If you find a job that interests you, read the entire announcement to make sure you are eligible and you meet the qualifications. Eligibility requirements for Federal jobs vary greatly and are categorized into different groups. USAJOBS uses hiring paths to help applicants identify job announcements that match their eligibility. Some examples of how eligibilities appear in job announcements include open to the public, veterans, current federal employees, individuals with disabilities, students, and recent graduates. Qualifications include your work experience, such as the type of work you have performed over a span of time. Qualifications also include skills, education level, and your knowledge of a particular occupational field. Hiring agencies review your qualifications once they determine you are eligible to be considered for a job. Your resumé 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 (not all job announcements will include this information).
- Read the **Requirements/Qualifications** section to see if you meet the job's qualifications.

Contact the agency representative if you have questions. The contact information is listed below the **How to apply** section of the job announcement.

5. Prepare Your Application in USAJOBS

Read the **How to Apply** section of the job announcement before starting your application. Click **Apply** to start your application. During the application process you can review, edit, and delete your information. USAJOBS will automatically save your progress as you go, so you will not lose any changes.

Complete the Assessment Questionnaire (if any) that collects information about your experience, education, knowledge, and skills to assist agencies in determining your qualifications for the position. After completing the Assessment Questionnaire, follow the prompts to submit your answers, and view/print the answers.

6. Submit Your Application to the Agency

When your application is ready in USAJOBS, the system will send you to the hiring agency application system where you can submit your application. Before you submit, you may need to complete other agency-required steps such as:

- Providing more personal information.
- Providing more documentation.
- Answering eligibility questions.
- Completing an occupational assessment—look for information on potential occupational assessments under the **How to Apply** section.

It may take you longer to apply to some jobs than others, because some agencies and jobs require more information than others.

After you submit your application, you can track your application and the status of the job. Click your **name** at the top of the page, and then click **Applications**. Your application status will state whether you applied for the job and the date you submitted your application if it was submitted. The job status will tell you in which phase the job is in the hiring process (e.g., accepting applications, reviewing applications, hiring complete, or job canceled).

How long will it take to receive an updated application status? It may take a few hours, after you submit your application, for the agency to update your status. You may also receive an email confirmation from the agency application system, but not all agencies send email confirmations.

7. Agency Reviews the Application

The hiring agency will start reviewing applications once the job announcement closes. The hiring agency will review your application to make sure you are eligible and meet the job qualifications. Applicants who are eligible and qualified are placed into categories, such as “Best-Qualified”, “Well-Qualified”, and “Qualified.” After the hiring agency reviews all applications, they will send the highest qualified candidates to the hiring official for consideration.

Employment Assessments

Depending on the job, you may be prompted to take an employment assessment after you submit your application to the agency. Some employment assessments are self-paced and taken online where other assessments are completed through a proctored environment. Agencies use

employment assessments to determine whether a candidate has the skills, experience, or knowledge to succeed in the job. Examples of employment assessments include job knowledge tests and writing samples. You will receive instructions from the hiring agency on how, when, and where to complete the assessment.

8. Interview

The hiring official will review the applications/resumés of the highest qualified candidates and select applicants to interview based on the agency policy. The hiring agency will contact candidates directly to schedule interviews.

Hiring officials can interview candidates using:

- A panel
- In-person
- Video (e.g., Zoom, MS Teams, etc.)
- Phone

You may be asked to take more than one interview. For example, you may have a phone interview and then an in-person or virtual interview. An agency may use a “structured” interview (where each applicant is asked standard questions) earlier in the process as a formal assessment, or may interview later as part of the final selection process.

How long will it take to schedule an interview? It may take some time to schedule interviews, depending on the number of applications that must be processed, and the number of candidates interviewed.

9. Agency Selects Candidate

After the hiring agency completes all interviews, the hiring official will select a candidate(s). The human resources specialist will contact the candidate(s) to start the job offer process. For those not selected, the hiring agency may send notification that the position was filled. On USAJOBS, the Application section will show the status in which the job is in the hiring process. Once a selection is made, the job status will change 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 to the candidate(s) selected by the hiring official. Once this offer is accepted, the agency will start the background investigation. There are different types of background investigations that are determined by the responsibilities of the position. Therefore, the degree of information that the candidate may be required to provide and that may be covered during the course of the background investigation will be dependent upon the type of job. In some instances, the candidate may be able to start the job before the background investigation is completed.

When is the job offer final? The job offer is final when the agency makes a favorable determination about the candidate's suitability or fitness, eligibility to hold a national security position, and/or eligibility to hold a personal identity verification credential. The hiring agency will contact the candidate(s) directly to set up a start date (i.e., entrance on duty (EOD) date) and/or to complete any other necessary actions to complete the process.

The candidate may be allowed to start working before the background investigation is completed. Some Federal positions require additional pre-employment checks before an offer is finalized (e.g., financial disclosures).

Writing an Effective Resumé for Federal Jobs

Using the **Resumé Builder** in USAJOBS helps ensure you include essential information the hiring agency needs. You can also upload several resumé instead of using USAJOBS Resumé Builder. The format of the resumé is the applicant’s choice, but the resumé must include all information the hiring agency requested.

Read the job announcement carefully because it may specify information that must be included in your resumé. Hiring agencies may place a reasonable limit on the number of pages of a resumé that will be reviewed as part of your initial qualification determination.

Required Information	
<p>The following sections are required when applying for Federal positions. The dates of employment and the number of hours worked per week in each position are particularly important in your resumé to determine qualifications.</p>	
Personal Information	Education
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Full Name <input type="checkbox"/> Mailing Address <input type="checkbox"/> Email Address <input type="checkbox"/> Phone Number <input type="checkbox"/> Citizenship <input type="checkbox"/> Military Status (if applicable) <input type="checkbox"/> Current/Former Federal Employee (if applicable) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> School Name, Country, City/State, Zip Code <input type="checkbox"/> Degree Attained or Pursuing/Major <input type="checkbox"/> Completion Date or Expected Date <input type="checkbox"/> Total Credits (if not completed) * <input type="checkbox"/> Major – GPA** <input type="checkbox"/> Honors* <input type="checkbox"/> Related Coursework *
Work Experience	Include the Following Information
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Employer Name and Full Address or City and State <input type="checkbox"/> Number of Hours Worked Per Week <input type="checkbox"/> Supervisor’s Name and Phone Number <input type="checkbox"/> Employment Dates (month/year – month/year) <input type="checkbox"/> Job Title, Grade (if Federal), Rank (if Military) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Selective Service Registration Status (Males) <input type="checkbox"/> Eligibility for Veterans Preference (Refer to www.opm.gov or www.Fedshirevets.gov) <input type="checkbox"/> Federal Employee Status (Current Federal civilian employee, former Federal employee)
<p><i>*This information is optional.</i></p> <p>**Required only if stated in the job announcement</p>	

When writing your resumé for Federal jobs, keep the following helpful tips in mind:

Your Resumé Is:

- Your Federal application.
- Used to determine your qualifications.
- The best way to market yourself to employers.
- The tool you use to show you can provide immediate results.

You Should:

- Use plain language – avoid jargon.
- Explain acronyms and use them sparingly.
- Highlight relevant experience and education.
- State the facts – do not exaggerate.
- Explain **what** you did, **how** you did it (e.g., skills, software, systems, etc.), **why** you did it (in order to...), and any results (e.g., saved organization \$10,000).
- Clearly show how you meet the specialized experience for the job.
- Consider creating resúmes customized to the jobs you apply to based on the extent/variety of your experience.
- Not include photographs or personal information that is not requested in the job announcement.
- Use the USAJOBS Resumé Builder to learn what must be included in your resumé.
- Carefully check spelling and grammar.

Tips for Second Chance Applicants

- There is no need to include information about your criminal history in your job application/resumé.
- Be truthful regarding your qualifications, and include the skills you learned, trades, certifications, or degrees you earned, or jobs you held while incarcerated. For example:
 - Language skills
 - Experience with computers
- Demonstrate specific, relevant experience and show accomplishments. Consider including experience you gained doing volunteer work, community work, or freelance work. You can include specific examples of activities and responsibilities you had during your employment gap that are relevant to the duties or responsibilities of the position.
- If your work experience post-release spans several years, you can emphasize that more recent experience in your resumé. Read the job announcement and concentrate on the position requirements.
- Support answers provided on the occupational questionnaire with descriptions of accomplishments.
- Attend webinars or information sessions offered by Federal agencies on how to write an effective resumé, interviewing techniques, and other employment topics. These sessions are offered year-round for applicants. Visit USAJOBS for details.

Writing A Cover Letter

Cover letters are usually optional when applying for Federal positions, however one may be required if stated in the job announcement. The cover letter can add value to the application package if written effectively. It should highlight strengths and specific accomplishments that demonstrate your skills and help you stand out from other candidates. Customize your cover letter to each position and include the job title and announcement number. Your cover letter should not be more than one page. The following is guidance on what to consider when creating your cover letter.

Format

Your cover letter should be formatted like a professional business letter. The font should match the font you used on your resumé, and you should use a font that is easy to read. Consider using a basic font type (e.g., Times New Roman, Calibri, Arial) and an appropriate size (e.g., 11 or 12 points).

Your Cover Letter Should Include the Following:

- **Greeting:** Address your cover letter to the proper person (if you know the name) and include the address. If you do not know the hiring manager's name, you may use, "Dear Hiring Manager" or something similar.
- **Opening:** This should immediately appeal to the reader to catch their attention on why you are a great candidate. Begin with a personable and inviting opening paragraph that speaks to how your skills are a perfect fit to the position and organization.
- **Body:** Highlight your job-related accomplishments and skills.
- **Closing:** End the letter by making it clear that you would like to be interviewed and ask for the opportunity. Briefly recap your strengths as a potential hire and include your contact information.

Tips for Second Chance Applicants

- Describe how you can contribute to the organization and the skills, knowledge, and perspectives that you will bring to the organization.
- Address the requirements of the position and highlight your skill set and abilities without specifically addressing the timeline.

Interview Tips

Prior to the interview:

- Review the job announcement to prepare for job-related questions.
- Be prepared to show how you have used the job-related competencies that are included in the job announcement (e.g., research financial documents, customer service, analyze data).
- Test links, equipment, Wi-Fi connection, and sound for telephonic or virtual interviews.
- Obtain information from the scheduler such as point of contact and building access requirements such as type of identification needed. Inform the scheduler of any reasonable accommodation requirements. Find out how long it takes to navigate through security.
- Research the agency/organization to learn more about the mission and develop questions to ask during the interview.
- Rehearse with someone who is familiar with interviewing or record yourself and play it back to see how you did.

The day of the interview:

- If in person, arrive early so you are not rushed once you clear security. If virtual, log into the conferencing system early in case you have to trouble shoot any technology issues.
- Dress appropriately. Consider wearing basic colors and prints so that your clothes do not serve as a distraction during the interview.
- If in person, bring a few copies of your resumé in case someone would like to see it.
- Listen carefully to each question so that you are clear on how to respond and ask for clarity if you do not understand what was asked.
- Be honest. If you do not know something, express your willingness to learn a new skill.
- Project your voice.
- Be aware of your non-verbal communication such as slouching, eye contact, tapping fingers, etc.
- Be positive and highlight your job-related skills/talents that will set you apart from other candidates. Demonstrate why you are the best candidate for the position and how you will contribute to the success of the office/agency.
- When speaking about your accomplishments, use the STAR framework:
 - **Situation:** Describe the situation or event of that led to your accomplishment. Were you presented with any challenges or tight timeframes? Were you dealing with a difficult customer? Were you asked to solve a new problem?
 - **Task:** What was the specific goal or task you were asked to achieve?
 - **Action:** What were the specific actions you took to achieve the task? Focus on what you did as opposed to what others did. Use the words “I” or “me.”
 - **Result:** Describe the outcomes from your actions. How did the event end? What did you accomplish or learn? Who was impacted by your actions?

- Keep responses clear and concise.
- Be prepared to provide a list of your references at the end of the interview if requested.

Tips to address any gaps in employment:

- Prepare for any questions about gaps in your employment history. You can emphasize examples of activities and responsibilities that you had during employment gaps that are relevant to the duties or responsibilities of the position you are applying for. While you are free to voluntarily highlight relevant experiences you had while incarcerated, note that an interviewer is not allowed to explicitly ask you about your criminal history.

After the interview:

- Send a “thank you” email within 24 hours after the interview.

Internships, Fellowships, and Apprenticeships Chart

The Federal Government offers a variety of paid internships, fellowships, and apprenticeships for individuals who seek early careers in public service, as well as for those seeking mid-career changes in employment. These include positions found Governmentwide (e.g., Pathways) as well as programs unique to individual Federal agencies (e.g., U.S. State Department professional fellowships). Internships are typically designed for students (from high school to graduate level). Students usually alternate between periods of study and work, often doing the latter during school break times (e.g., spring, summer, and winter breaks). Participants work either part- or full-time, filling staffing gaps while exploring Federal careers. Federal Government fellowships are generally intended for persons with advanced degrees or substantial professional experience and are usually salaried positions lasting nine months to a year or more.

This chart highlights some of the common paths job seekers use for initial entry into Federal employment.

Program	Description	Eligibility, Requirements, and Features
<i>Pathways Internship</i>	<p>This program is designed to provide students enrolled in a wide variety of educational institutions, from high school to graduate level, with opportunities to work in agencies and explore Federal careers while still in school.</p> <p>Students are paid for the work performed.</p> <p>These positions are posted on USAJOBS. Website: https://www.usajobs.gov</p>	<p>Eligibility: High school, trade schools, two- and four-year colleges (undergraduate, graduate, and professional degrees).</p> <p>May work part- or full-time.</p> <p>Students alternate between work and study until they complete educational requirements and required work hours.</p> <p>Participants who successfully complete the internship may be eligible for conversion to a permanent position in the competitive civil service.</p>

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Program	Description	Eligibility, Requirements, and Features
Post-Secondary Student Hiring Authority	<p>This program allows agencies to hire certain post-secondary students to positions in the competitive civil service up to the General Schedule (GS) 11 grade level on a temporary or term basis.</p> <p>An agency may appoint individuals, on a time-limited basis, to a temporary appointment (for an initial period not to exceed 1 year), or a term appointment (for an initial period expected to last more than 1 year but less than 4 years), to coincide with the individual's academic curriculum and calendar.</p> <p>These positions may be posted on the agency's website, third party websites and/or USAJOBS.</p>	<p>Eligibility: Students must be enrolled or accepted for pursuing a bachelor's or graduate degree on at least a part-time basis (as determined by the academic institution). Students who are enrolled but have not yet started the course of study may apply and be considered.</p> <p>Students must meet the minimum qualifications of the position.</p> <p>An agency may convert a post-secondary student to a permanent appointment in the competitive civil service, within that same agency, without further competition if the student has completed the course of study leading to a bachelor's or graduate degree and meets the qualification standards for the position to which converted.</p>
Pathways Recent Graduates	<p>This program offers developmental experiences in the Federal Government intended to promote careers in the civil service to individuals who have recently graduated from qualifying educational institutions or programs. The program lasts for one year (unless the training requirements of the position warrant a longer and more structured training program).</p> <p>These positions are posted on USAJOBS.</p> <p>This unique experience includes an orientation program, mentorship, an individual development plan, at least 40 hours of formal, interactive training, and more.</p> <p>Website: https://www.usajobs.gov/Help/working-in-government/unique-hiring-paths/students/</p>	<p>Eligibility: Recent graduates who have completed, within the previous two years, a qualifying associates, bachelors, masters, professional, doctorate, vocational or technical degree or certificate from a qualifying educational institution.*</p> <p>Participants who successfully complete the program may be eligible for conversion to a permanent position in the competitive civil service.</p>
College Graduate Hiring Authority	<p>This program allows agencies to hire recent college graduates to fill professional and administrative positions in the competitive civil service at GS-11 level and below.</p> <p>These positions may be posted on the agency's website, third party websites and/or USAJOBS.</p>	<p>Eligibility: Students must be recent graduates who have completed, within the previous two years, a bachelor's, or graduate degree.</p>

Program	Description	Eligibility, Requirements, and Features
<p>Presidential Management Fellows (PMF)</p>	<p>This is the Federal Government’s flagship leadership development program for advanced degree candidates. Created more than three decades ago, the program attracts and selects from among the best candidates and is designed to develop a cadre of potential Federal Government leaders.</p> <p>The program is centrally administered by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM). OPM announces the opportunity to apply (usually in the fall) via USAJOBS.</p> <p>The PMF experience includes an orientation program, senior-level mentorship, an individual development plan, developmental opportunities, at least 80 hours of formal, interactive training each year, and more.</p> <p>Websites: https://www.usajobs.gov/Help/working-in-government/unique-hiring-paths/students/</p> <p>And www.pmf.gov</p>	<p>Eligibility: Individuals who have completed within the past two years, a qualifying advanced degree (e.g., masters or professional degree such as M.D. or J.D.).</p> <p>Candidates are usually hired at GS-9 thru GS-12 or equivalent.</p> <p>After successful program completion and job performance, the PMF may be converted to a permanent position in the competitive civil service.</p>
<p>Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP)</p>	<p>Connects Federal and private-sector employers nationwide with college students and recent graduates with disabilities for summer or permanent jobs.</p> <p>Candidates represent all majors and range from college freshmen to graduate and law-school students</p> <p>Information from candidates is compiled in a searchable database that is available through their website. Website: https://www.wrp.gov/</p>	<p>Students enrolled or accepted for enrollment in an institution of higher education (as defined in 20 U.S.C. § 1001(a)) and pursuing a baccalaureate or graduate degree on at least a part-time basis as determined by the academic institution.</p> <p>Appointments will be made under the Schedule A appointing authority for individuals with disabilities.</p> <p>This is a special (excepted) appointing authority that agencies can use to non-competitively appoint individuals, including eligible veterans, who have a psychiatric, intellectual, or severe physical disability.</p>

<i>Program</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Eligibility, Requirements, and Features</i>
<i>Apprenticeships</i>	<p>Apprenticeship programs offer opportunities for paid, relevant workplace experience while acquiring the skills and credentials valued by federal employers. Federal Government agencies can use apprenticeships as an effective human resources strategy to recruit quality candidates, train employees to the specific needs of agencies, and retain and grow a highly skilled workforce. Using standardized training curricula, which fit readily into existing agency training programs, Federal agencies can ensure their employees have a comprehensive understanding of both the practical and theoretical components of mission-critical occupations. Apprentices are provided with opportunities for incremental wage increases, industry-recognized credentials, and a definitive career path within the Federal Government.</p>	<p>To learn more about federal apprenticeship opportunities, visit https://www.apprenticeship.gov/federal-agency-apprenticeship-programs</p>

Agency-Specific Internships and Fellowships

Individual Federal agencies offer a variety of internships and fellowship opportunities for students, recent graduates, professionals, and other job seekers who want to connect with agency missions and employ their unique education, background, and skill sets in service to the Nation.

Federal Agency	Website
Department of Agriculture	http://www.dm.usda.gov/employ/student/index.htm
Department of Commerce	https://www.commerce.gov/hr/careers/students/internships
Department of Defense	https://www.dodciviliancareers.com/civiliancareers/studentsrecentgrads
Department of Education	https://www2.ed.gov/students/prep/job/intern/note.html
Department of Energy	http://orise.orau.gov/doescholars/
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) – Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)	www.cdc.gov/fellowships
Food and Drug Administration (FDA)	http://www.fda.gov/AboutFDA/WorkingatFDA/FellowshipInternshipGraduateFacultyPrograms/
Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)	https://humancapital.learning.hhs.gov/elp.asp
National Institutes of Health (NIH)	http://www.training.nih.gov/programs
Department of Homeland Security (DHS)	https://www.dhs.gov/homeland-security-careers/students
Department of the Interior	http://www.doi.gov/pathways
Department of Justice	https://www.justice.gov/legal-careers
Department of State	https://careers.state.gov/interns-fellows/
Department of Transportation	https://www.transportation.gov/careers/internships
Department of Treasury	https://www.treasury.gov/careers/hq-careers/Pages/student-employment.aspx
Department of Veterans Affairs	http://www.vacareers.va.gov/
U.S. Supreme Court Fellows Program	http://www.supremecourt.gov/fellows/default.aspx
U.S. Supreme Court Internship Program	https://www.supremecourt.gov/jobs/internship/InternshipProgram.aspx
U.S. House of Representatives	https://www.house.gov/employment
U.S. Senate	http://www.senate.gov/pagelayout/visiting/h_multi_sections_and_teasers/employment.htm



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