Second Chance Act

Federal Job Search Guide

Contents

If you have questions about the information in this guide, contact us at:

outreach@opm.gov

The Federal Government employs people—including some who may have criminal records—that possess the requisite knowledge, skills, and abilities.

Consistent with Merit System Principles, agencies are generally required to consider people with criminal records when filling positions if they are among the highest rated candidates and can comply with requirements.

For most Federal jobs, questions regarding criminal history do not appear on initial job applications. If a candidate seeking admission to the civil service receives a conditional offer of employment, they must complete a Declaration for Federal Employment (OF 306) and undergo a background investigation to establish "suitability," or fitness for employment.

People with criminal records are eligible for employment in the vast majority of Federal jobs. For a few positions, they may not be eligible because specific laws or statutes prohibit employment, depending on the crime committed.

Understanding Eligibility and Qualifications for Federal Jobs

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 several different eligibilities in the Federal Government that an authority permits an agency to consider; 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 a current students or recent graduates.

Your eligibility has nothing to do with your work experience, skills, and other qualifications.

Why is eligibility important?

Understanding your eligibility will help you know which jobs you should apply to. You can apply to any job, but you may not be eligible for the job if you don't fall into one of the required hiring paths listed on the job announcement. If you're not eligible, the hiring agency will reject your application.

## How do I know if I'm eligible for a job?

Before you apply

You must read the "This job is open to" section of the job announcement to see if you're eligible for the job. If you fall into one of the hiring paths listed, you're eligible for the job. If you don't fall into one of those groups, you should look at a different job.

After you apply

The agency will first review your application to see if you're eligible. If you're not eligible, they will reject your application—they won't even look at your qualifications. It doesn't matter if you have the qualifications—you must first be eligible.

The Federal Hiring Process
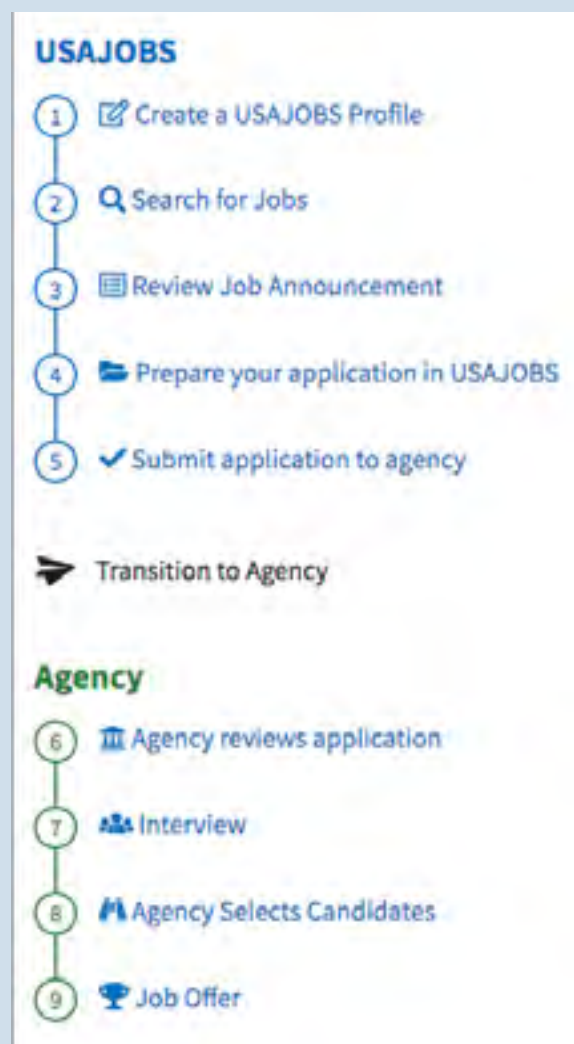
This process is in place to make sure all applicants receive fair and equal opportunity.

For more information about eligibility, qualifications, and other tips on the Federal hiring process, go to:

USAJOBS.GOV

What are qualifications?

Qualifications include your work experience (years, type of work), skills, education level and your overall knowledge of a particular field of study.

Like any other employer, the Federal Government expects its employees to be well qualified for the jobs they hold. The U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) publishes qualification standards to help ensure Federal employees can successfully and safely perform the work of the position.

Whatever your background has been, it is likely that you are basically qualified for many different jobs, and highly qualified for some. It will depend on the specific job opportunity you are applying for and the requirements stated in the job announcement. Read the job announcement carefully, especially the qualifications and eligibility sections.

The hiring agency will look at your qualifications after they determine your eligibility. The hiring agency will rank you based on how well you meet the qualifications of the job.

Regardless of your qualifications, if you're not eligible, the hiring agency will reject your application and you will not be hired for that job.

How do I know if I'm qualified?

Before you apply

You must read the Qualifications section of the job announcement. Your application must show you have the specialized experience, education, and other qualifications listed in the job announcement.

After you apply

If you're eligible for the job, the agency will review your qualifications and rank you based on how well you meet the qualifications. The agency may rank you as minimally qualified, highest qualified, or somewhere in between. Based on how well you meet the qualifications, your application may, or may not, continue through the application process.

What if I have a college degree?

A few Federal occupations require a college degree with a certain major field of study or completion of specific academic courses at the baccalaureate or graduate level. Such occupations tend to involve research; scientific or professional work (such as contract specialist; medical; engineering; biology; psychology, or accounting).

Also, there are many occupations where a baccalaureate degree in any field is acceptable. Job applicants usually enter such occupations at the entry grade levels [typically GS-05 or GS-07 grade levels (or equivalent)] and acquire on-the-job training and work experience before advancing to higher grade levels. Such occupations are sometimes listed as trainee, intern, or Pathways intern or recent graduates positions.

You may qualify for a GS-9 grade (or equivalent) level position on the basis of a master's degree, and for the GS-11 grade (or equivalent) level on the basis of a doctoral degree. At these levels, however, the advanced degree must be directly related to the work of the job to be filled.

To be acceptable, all college level courses must have been completed at a college or university that has obtained accreditation or pre-accreditation status from an accrediting body recognized by the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education.

How do I qualify for jobs at higher grades?

Generally, for jobs at the GS-7 grade (or equivalent) level and higher, your background must have included specialized experience. That experience must be closely related to the work to be performed in the job for which you are applying. At least one year of the specialized experience must have been equivalent to the level of the next lower grade in the Federal service. This means, for example, to qualify for a GS-12 grade (or equivalent) level, you must have had a minimum of one year of specialized experience equivalent to a GS-11 grade (or equivalent) level.

SHAPE AMERICA'S FUTURE

Find your fit in the Federal Government

Create Profile

USAJOBS Tip #1

Create your USAJOBS Profile as soon as possible so you can set up customized searches that will help you find results that best meet your experience and education.

What if I do not have a degree?

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

If you are just starting out, you can qualify for jobs at the lower grade levels with a combination of education and general experience. General experience does not necessarily relate directly to the position, but demonstrates the ability to acquire the particular competencies/ knowledge, skills and abilities to perform the work of the position. At higher grade (or equivalent) levels, additional work experience is required. Starting at the GS-5 grade (or equivalent) level, positions generally require one year of specialized experience equal to the next lower grade.

How are well-qualified job applicants distinguished from basically-qualified ones?

If you meet the basic eligibility requirements, the agency evaluates and then ranks your work experience, accomplishments, education, training, and overall qualifications background against the qualification requirements of the position. You will receive a score or ranking based on how closely your background matches with the requirements of the position. Job applicants who receive the highest scores or rank in the top category are referred to the selecting official.

What are the qualification requirements for trades and crafts (blue collar) jobs?

Trades and crafts blue collar jobs have a separate qualification system from white collar positions. Applicants for the 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/knowledge, skills, and abilities (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 basically qualified, applicants must demonstrate mastery of the specified job elements through work experience, training, or tests.

Explore Hiring Paths

Open to the Public
U.S. citizens, nationals or those who owe allegiance to the U.S.

Federal Employees
Current or former, includes the competitive and excepted services

Veterans

Military Spouses

National Guard & Reserves
Current or prospective members

Students & recent graduates

Senior Executives

Individuals with a disability

Family of overseas employees

Native Americans
American Indian or Alaskan Native

Peace Corps & AmeriCorps VISTA

Special authorities

The Federal Government offers unique hiring paths to help hire individuals that represent our diverse society.

Visit USAJOBS.GOV to learn more about each hiring path and your eligibility.

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/profile but creating one early in the process will enhance your job search experience.

- Select **Create Profile** or **Sign In** on the USAJOBS Home Page, which will take you to <u>LOGIN.GOV</u>.

- Choose **Create an account** to begin the process.

- Enter your email address **(Do NOT use a .gov, .mil or .edu email address, as you may lose access to that account)**, then click **Submit**.

- Check your email—<u>LOGIN.GOV</u> will send you a confirmation email with a link to confirm your email address. Click the link and return to <u>login.gov</u> to finish creating your account.

- Use the password strength meter on the screen to create a strong password, with at least 12 characters, then select **Continue**.

- To make your account more secure than using only a password, select **Text message (SMS), Phone call, Authentication application,** or **Security key** as your preferred means to complete the two-factor authentication, then select **Continue**.

- You will receive a one-time security code via the method you chose in the previous step. Enter this code and select **Submit**.

- LOGIN.GOV will give you a personal key that can be used to regain access to your account if you lose access to the device you selected above. Be sure to write this key down or print it and select **Continue**.

- After securing your personal key, you will be asked to enter it to confirm you stored it. Enter your personal key and select **Continue** to sign into USAJOBS.

- Once logged in, your USAJOBS account home page will appear. Select **Create Profile** then **Complete Profile** in the pop up window to set up your USAJOBS profile.

- Follow the steps to complete your **Contact, Citizenship and Experience** information—you must complete all of the required fields.

Congratulations, you have created your profile and can now apply for Federal jobs!

Before doing anything else, we recommend you select **Preferences** and fill out all optional fields. Then click **Save Preferences**. USAJOBS can use this information to improve your job search results.

Your USAJOBS account home page is where you go to make changes in USAJOBS to improve your Federal job search.

For example, you can work with active and archived applications; review and edit saved jobs and searches; initiate new job searches; and view, edit, and update selected documents, including résumés and supporting documents.

Create/Upload A Résumé

You can create or upload up to five different résumés and upload 10 supporting documents (e.g., student transcript, cover letter, DD-214) to use when applying for Federal jobs. Consider using the USAJOBS Résumé Builder to create at least one of your résumés. You can make one résumé "searchable" to allow agencies to notify you of potential job opportunities.

- When logged in and on your USAJOBS account home page, select **Documents** and then **Résumé**.

- Click on the plus sign at the bottom of the screen to build or upload a **Résumé**.

- Select **Build Résumé** or **Upload Résumé** 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**.

Finding and Applying for Federal Jobs

Perform A Job Search

You can search USAJOBS using a **General Search** without logging in. Once logged in, you can also conduct **Informed** or **Advanced Searches**.

A **General Search** obtains results for a broad range of positions based on your keyword(s) and/or location, and applicable filters.

For a **General Search**, type information into the **Keywords** and/or **Location** boxes and select **Search**. Keyword autocomplete will assist and prompt recommendations (i.e., occupations, job titles, series, departments, and agencies) to help narrow your scope.

An **Informed Search** uses your profile and preferences to filter results for jobs that meet your eligibility and match your preferences.

For an **Informed Search**, sign into your **USAJOBS Profile**. Select **Search** and the results will be filtered and provided based on your criteria. If you have not already, update your **Profile** to select the hiring path(s) you may be eligible for (e.g., U.S. Citizens, Recent Graduates, Veterans, Peace Corps/AmeriCorps VISTA). In your **Preferences**, select your specific work preferences (e.g., **work location, appointment type, schedule**, etc.). You can turn off the Profile toggle to search without using your Preferences.

An **Advanced Search** allows you to refine results using more specific criteria and filters.

To conduct an **Advanced Search**, select **Search** and use the filters on the right to further refine your search. For example, you can select search criteria such as **Hiring Path**, **Pay** (salary or grade), **Department** or **Agency** or **Series** (occupational designators) or input a **Location** like a state, city or zip code (keyword autocomplete will prompt recommendations) or other options under **More Filters**. When ready, select **Search**.

Your search criteria are displayed as individual tags under the search banner. If you are logged in, you may select **Save this Search**, name the search, and select the notification frequency (Daily, Weekly, Monthly, Never). Choose daily if you are looking for specific jobs, since some jobs can open and close within a week. If you select daily, you will receive one email per day IF new jobs have been posted that match your criteria in the last 24 hours. Select the job title that interests you to view the full **Job Opportunity Announcement (JOA)**.

Apply For A Job

The USAJOBS Application guides you through a five-step process:

1) Select Résumé,
2) Select Documents,
3) Review Package,
4) Include Personal Information, and
5) Continue Application with Agency.

Begin the application process by reviewing your Search Results pages and choosing the job(s) that interest you. Review each JOA, including their How to Apply and Required Documents sections.

Find a job that you want to apply for and select Apply.

The "Welcome to the USAJOBS Application Process" displays. Select Start Application.

Complete the steps in order:

- Select Résumé
- Select Documents
- Review Package, and
- Include Personal Information, selecting Save & Continue after each step.

On Step 5, Continue Application with Agency appears. Read the disclaimer, check the box, and then select Continue to Agency Site.

USAJOBS will redirect you to the hiring agency's application system to complete the rest of the application process.

Some agency systems may require you to create an account on their site. Follow the instructions on the agency site.

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. Once you complete the instructions on the agency's site, you have completed the application process and should receive notification from the agency that they received your application.

> **You can create up to ten Saved Searches.**
>
> **Click Edit Notifications settings to change your notifications to daily, weekly, monthly, or turn them off.**

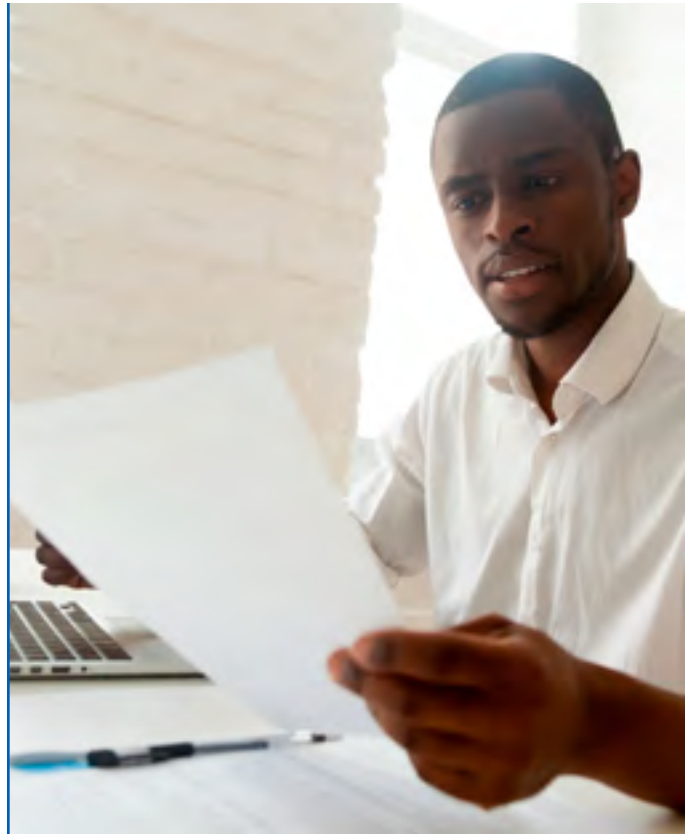# Federal Résumé Writing Tips

When writing your Federal résumé, keep the following helpful tips in mind.

Your Resume Is:
- Your Federal application
- The best way to market yourself to employers
- How you convey your qualifications for the job
- The tool you use to show you can provide immediate results
- Your first and possibly only impression
- Used to determine minimum qualifications
- Sometimes used to separate those who are best qualified from those only basically qualified

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 and HOW it made a difference, i.e., did you leave the job better than you found it?
- Clearly show how you meet the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) for the job

Résumé Writing Tip #2: Explain what you did in previous jobs and how it made a difference—in other words, show them why they should hire YOU.

Résumé Writing Tip #1: Use plain language—avoid jargon and use acronyms sparingly, spelling them out the first time they are used. This will make your résumé clearer for those who will review it.

You Should:
- Consider creating up to five customized résumés based on the extent/variety of your experience
- Not include personally identifiable information
- Not include photographs
- Use résumés created with the USAJOBS Resume Builder or uploaded from your own files
- Use the USAJOBS Resume Builder to learn what must be included on your résumé
- Carefully check spelling and grammar

Effective Federal Résumés:
- Are sufficient in length to show qualifications
- Demonstrate specific, relevant experience
- Clearly show results and accomplishments
- Reflect possession of the KSAs, leaving no doubt about your qualifications
- Are flawless with regard to spelling and grammar
- Explain acronyms and avoid jargon
- Provide agencies the necessary info to qualify you for their jobs
- Support answers on the occupational questionnaire with genuine descriptions of accomplishments and achievements

Writing an Effective Federal Résumé

When writing your resume, you should consider your accomplishments making your resume results-driven. It is best to break your resume down into major sections, outlining personal information, education, experience and other qualifying information. Job Opportunity Announcements may specify information that must be included on your resume, so please read it carefully. Using the Resume Builder in USAJOBS helps ensure that you include this essential information.

The following information is required when applying for Federal positions. Omitting this information could result in your being determined unqualified for the position.

Personal Information

- Full Name
- Mailing Address
- Email Address
- Phone Number
- Citizenship
- Military Status

Education

- School Name, Country, City/State Zip Code
- Degree Attained or Pursuing/Major
- Completion Date or Expected Date of Completion
- Major - GPA*
- Total Credits (if not completed)*
- Honors*
- Related Coursework*

  *This information is optional, but recommended.

Also Include the Following Information

- Selective Service Registration Status (Males)
- Eligibility for Derived Veterans Preference (information can be found at www.OPM.gov)
- Federal Employee Status (Current Federal civilian employee, former Federal employee [with or without] reinstatement eligibility)

Work Experience

- Employer Name and Full Address
- Job Title, Grade (if Federal), Rank (if Military)
- Salary*
- Start and End Dates of Employment (Month and Year)
- Number of Hours Worked Per Week
- Supervisor's Name and Phone Number
- May we contact your current supervisor?*
- Duties and Accomplishments

Skills/Certifications

You may include any related skills and certifications. This information is *only* required when stated in the job opportunity announcement.

Volunteer Work

Volunteer experience may be included in a separate section or listed with other work experience. Please note however, that the same information is required as with regular work experience. (See example in the Sample Resume, pages 10-11.)

Sample Résumé

John Q. Public
123 College Street, Cincinnati, OH 45231
Home: 513-123-4567
Email: Johnqp@email.com

U.S. Citizen
Federal Status (e.g. Career, Career Conditional) Veterans'
Preference (if any)
Selective Service Registration Status (Males only)

TECHNICAL SKILLS or SUMMARY OF SKILLS
This is not a requirement, however you can highlights specific skills you possess that are related to the position. If you have little work experience, think about skills you have developed

Proficient in Microsoft Office (Word, PowerPoint, Outlook and Excel)
Pre-audit analysis
Skilled in tax examinations

WORK EXPERIENCE

Internal Revenue Service   December 2015-Current
1234 Work Street, Covington, KY 41011   20 hours per week
Internal Revenue Agency   GS-0512-7
Supervisor: Ms. Jackie Smith (859) 555-1111
 (May Contact)

- Examine and audit individual, business and corporate tax returns to determine correct federal tax liabilities
- Conduct field examinations and discuss findings with the taxpayer or their representative Perform package audits to ensure compliance, and determine need for multiple year examinations based on finding
- Conduct pre-audit analysis of assigned cases, researching any available background materials, and formulating a plan for the audit
- Received public recognition and time-off award for consistently completing a minimum of 20 additional analyses per year

Ace Financial   August 2013-December 2015
1234 Work Street, Cincinnati, OH 41073   20 hours per week
Accounting Assistant (Internship) $21,000 per year

Supervisor: Ms. Jackie Smith (513) 555-1111
 (May Contact)

- Developed monthly statements
- Researched and resolved invoice discrepancies
- Entered accounts payable and accounts receivable into accounting system
- Processed payments and organized client billing folders
- Assisted with daily cash balancing
- Reconciled bank statements and ledger accounts

EDUCATION

If the position requires education or certification to qualify, consider creating a section that details the information. Below is an example of how you can communicate your education. You can also include other trainings related to the position.

Institution Name
City, State, Zip Code
Degree/Certification – GPA (if required per the job opportunity announcement) Graduation/Completion
Date or Expected Graduation/Completion Date

Relevant Coursework
You may list some of the completed coursework if it is related to the job, especially if you haven't completed your degree or certification

Should you include volunteer experience? Absolutely. Volunteer experience is just as important as paid experience. Include the same employment information as you would for paid work.

VOLUNTEER/COMMUNITY SERVICE EXPERIENCE

Your Taxes Done Right (non-profit)   March 2017 - Current
123 Tax Drive, Covington, KY 41016   15 Hours Per Week
Tax Preparer
Supervisor: Jack Johnson, (859) 555-0000

Assist more than 250 individuals each year with filing their taxes
Stay abreast of new tax laws and advise peers of changes
Review peers' work prior to submission

AWARDS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

You can list awards, recognitions and achievements in this section. Consider those that are related to the vacant position and include them as well. If you have little to no work experience, you may include other awards. See the examples below.

• Sustained Outstanding Performance Ratings 2014 – 2018
• Director's Award - 2017
• Member of the National Honors Society – 2016

***** OPTIONAL INFORMATION YOU MAY INCLUDE (SAMPLES) *****

Job-related training
• Calculating Taxes for Individuals - 2018
• Itemizing Federal Taxes – 2018 and 2019
• Exemption Laws for Tax Preparers – 2019

Language Skills
• Fluent in speaking and writing Spanish
• Skilled in conversational French

Professional Affiliations
Lifetime member of the National Association of Tax Professionals

References
In addition to providing the names of your supervisors, you may want to list professional or personal references who can vouch for your character, work ethic and dependability.

U.S. Office of Personnel Management

OPM.GOV