



# FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

What do federal government workers do? Simply put, they do everything that private sector workers do, and more. Federal employees hold positions as accountants, administrative assistants, bookkeepers, librarians, computer specialists, data analysts, lawyers, project managers, communications specialists, and countless other titles. Because federal departments and agencies perform an enormous variety of tasks, it's impossible to describe in a few lines the myriad opportunities open to political science graduates.

Your political science courses help you develop a solid knowledge of the origins and development of government, including the numerous varieties of governmental units as well as the broad reach of government programs. In your classes you also examine problems involving government operations, political struggles between levels of government, and the basic intricacies of public administration and policymaking. In this sense, the looming shortage of federal employees offers great opportunities for students who are now in school.

To begin exploring whether federal employment may be right for you, it will be useful to first consider how the federal hires and promotes most of its employees.

## THE CIVIL SERVICE SYSTEM

- Most federal workers are employed through the Civil Service system, which maintains standardized hiring, salary and promotion procedures for most federal departments and agencies. Salary levels for the Civil Service are determined through the General Schedule (GS) system. Actual salaries depend on a person's job type, with clerical jobs paying less and professional jobs requiring expertise paying more. Many entry-level federal jobs open to political science graduates start in the GS 6 through 9 range, although some new hires may start lower or higher.

(For more information, see: [http://www.federaljobs.net/salarybase.htm#Wage\\_Grade\\_Salary\\_Tables](http://www.federaljobs.net/salarybase.htm#Wage_Grade_Salary_Tables))

- The USAJobs website is Office of Personnel Management's main resource for those seeking a job in the federal government. Located at <https://www.usajobs.gov>, it includes automated job listings for all departments, agencies and offices throughout the U.S. and abroad, employment fact sheets, job application and related forms, and an online resume development program.

## ALTERNATIVE FEDERAL HIRING PROGRAMS

- In addition to regular Civil Service employment, many federal agencies sponsor separate employment categories to accommodate part-time or limited-duration workers, or to provide training or other opportunities for college students. Increasingly, the federal government is finding innovative ways to attract college students and expose them to federal job opportunities. Student employment programs include
- **The Federal Career Intern Program (FCIP)** - is designed to help agencies recruit and attract exceptional individual into a variety of occupations and is intended for positions at grade levels GS-5, 7, and 9. In general, individuals are appointed to 2-year internships. Upon successful completion of the internships, the interns may be eligible for permanent placement.
- **Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP):** Student employment provides an opportunity to earn money and continue your education, to train with people who manage the day-to-day business of the Federal government, and to combine your academic study with on-the-job experience. Job opportunities under this program offer you temporary employment with the Department of Commerce. Employment can range from summer jobs to positions that last as long as you are a student. These employment opportunities need not be related to your academic field of study.

- **The Presidential Management Fellows (PMF) Program** - is the federal government's premier leadership development program for advanced degree candidates. Individuals who received a qualifying advanced degree within the preceding two years are eligible to apply and are not required to be nominated by their school. This two-year fellowship includes competitive pay and benefits, 80 hours of training each year, a senior-level mentor, a mandatory four to six month developmental assignment and optional rotations of one to six months duration. It is designed to provide challenging work assignments and opportunities to network with other future leaders. In 2016, more than 6,000 people applied and 552 were selected as finalists, making them eligible for appointment to a federal position as Presidential Management Fellow.
- **The Recent Graduates Program:** This opportunity is a full-time, one-year developmental program designed for individuals who have received an undergraduate or graduate degree from a qualifying educational institution or program. Candidates must apply within two years of graduation, with the exception of veterans, who have up to six years to apply due to their military obligations. Participants in the Recent Graduates Program receive training and professional development, complete an individual development plan and are assigned a mentor. Each agency determines how many recent graduates they will hire. Recent graduates may also be eligible for conversion to full-time federal employment after their completion of the program.
- **Volunteer Programs:** Many federal agencies and departments offer unpaid training opportunities to students currently enrolled in an academic program. As a student volunteer, you will gain valuable work experience in the federal government as it relates to your field. If you are interested in becoming a student volunteer with the federal government you should contact the personnel office at the federal agency or department of your choice. *There is no central listing of student volunteer opportunities.*
- **AmeriCorps** – employs more than 50000 citizens each year in a variety of national service programs involving education, public safety, health, and the environment. To qualify, applicants must be U.S. citizens, nationals, or lawful permanent residents aged 17 or older. Full-time participants serve from 10-12 months and receive an educational award to pay for graduate school or pay back student loans. The program also provides health insurance, training and student loan deferments.

For more information, go to < <https://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/ameri corps>>

## PROS AND CONS ASSOCIATED WITH GOVERNMENT CAREERS

- Federal employment offers significant benefits, including paid vacation and sick leave, paid holidays, medical insurance, retirement plans and often tuition assistance. In addition, government employees often enjoy greater job security than private-sector workers. While government jobs are not guaranteed, they are more insulated from the normal business cycles and temporary economic setbacks that can result in the loss of private-sector jobs. Perhaps most important, government jobs offer real opportunities to do public service. While public employees are paid liveable salaries, the real compensation often lies in the satisfaction of helping people or making a real impact on public issues.
- For others with different personal and work values, government service may have several disadvantages. Many government jobs don't pay as well as similar positions in the private sector. The GS systems' rigidity means that when cost-of-living differences for each region are considered, employees in regions with higher costs make less than those in regions with lower costs. And while government workers enjoy adequate sick and vacation leave, their health and retirement plans may lag behind those in major corporations or workplaces with strong union representation.
- The above points about salary should be taken with a grain of salt. In some education areas, including political science and law enforcement, starting salaries are actually close to, if not better than the non-government market averages.

## WORKING FOR CONGRESS AND ITS MEMBERS

- There are many opportunities for political science students to work in a senator's or representative's Washington or home district office, or on the staff of a congressional committee. A congressional internship or a full-time position allows you to work on important policy issues, engage in career networking, and even be a part of history! If you polled the most influential bureaucrats, lobbyists and professional staff in Washington, chances are good that a majority of them got their start by working in a congressional office.
- Legislative internships and full-time staff positions offer excellent entry-level career opportunities for political science majors. House members have smaller staffs and offices (about ten Washington staff on average) than Senators (25-40 staff in Washington) but you don't have to move there to work for a Congress member of senator. Representatives typically have one to three offices in their home districts and senators have three or more offices spread throughout their home states.
- As with most work places, in congressional offices, you are expected to start at the bottom and work your way up. Basic staff positions include **staff assistants**, who fulfil miscellaneous duties such as answering phones, greeting visitors, sorting mail, giving tours, supervising interns and supporting more senior staff. **Legislative correspondents** work on answering the numerous letters and requests for information and services from members. Middle-level congressional positions include **legislative assistants**, who track and develop legislation in several policy areas for their members, and press secretaries, who help communicate their members' official positions to media, constituents, and interest groups. Finally, **chiefs of staff or staff directors** oversee all aspects of the Capitol Hill and district offices and-serve as primary advisors to their members. **Legislative directors**, on the other hand, manage all policy aspects of the offices.
- Because congressional employees often work long hours for minimal pay, staff turnover is high. This work culture encourages young people to stay a couple of years to gain experience, and then move on to something else. Middle to upper-level staffers are often lured to more lucrative positions in lobbying firms, government agencies, and trade and non-profit associations. Yet, many people who take jobs in Congress with the expectation of leaving after a year or two end up staying because they find rewards too great.

## FEDERAL INTELLIGENCE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT CAREERS

- While high profile agencies like the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and Secret Service get a lot of attention from students, there are dozens of other departments and agencies that perform intelligence and law enforcement duties including the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms and the Department of Homeland Security.
- Even though the Office of Personnel Management oversees most federal hiring, specific application procedures among federal law enforcement agencies vary greatly. Some agencies, such as the FBI and CIA, are exempt from OPM's competitive service procedures and instead hire their own employees directly. To apply, you must contact these specific agencies for more information.
- Generally, applicants for federal law enforcement and intelligence agencies must be U.S. citizens, hold a four-year degree from an accredited college or university, and pass a rigorous written and physical exam. Applicants with special skills and experiences, including foreign language proficiency in certain languages such as Chinese, Arabic or Russian, prior law enforcement or armed forces experience, and advanced technology or quantitative skills are more likely to get hired than applicants without those skills and experiences. Since all applicants who pass the written and physical examinations face a thorough background investigation, a clean police record and lifestyle history are essential.