Federal Government: Locate Hidden Positions

It is true that most federal agencies must advertise openings on USAJOBS, the federal government’s official career website, but some agencies do so with applicants already in mind. If you have been applying for federal positions and not landing interviews, try implementing one or more of the tips below. Better yet implement these strategies within your job search early on and save a lot of time.

Identify positions and agencies of interest

This first step will greatly assist you in conducting a successful federal career job search. Take your time researching position titles and agencies. Once you have an understanding of the federal job titles you qualify for, share your interests with your contacts. Additionally, you can start targeting agencies or departments based on their hiring demand for those positions.

POSITION RESEARCH

- Federal Jobs By College Major – Offers a list of job titles related to areas of study.
- Research position titles by analyzing Occupational Series – For example, series 0600- Medical, Hospital, Dental, and Public Health contains medical positions. If you were interested in that field, you could start researching titles within the 0600 series.
- Federal careers by field of interest – Go Government offers information on 18 different federal career fields as well as information on “Where the Jobs Are”.
- Try out a career field through an internship or volunteer position. Applicants must be currently enrolled in a degree seeking program to be eligible for internship opportunities.

AGENCY/DEPARTMENT RESEARCH

Use the resources below to research and identify agencies of interest based on their mission statement, mission critical hiring needs, area of work, populations they serve, etc. Create an agency target list by writing down all federal agencies that spark your interest.

- The Partnership for Public Services oversees a survey of the Best Places to Work in the Federal Government.
- Even the smaller organizations hire for a variety of positions. You may even have less competition. Review a list of all federal departments and agencies provided by USA.gov. Click on each to review their mission and examine their website to learn more.
- Browse career options by field.
- Some agencies are exempt from posting positions on USAJOBS, so their positions will be publicized on their websites.

Network

Every social gathering is an opportunity for you to meet someone new and learn about a field as well as share your interests with him/her. Reach out to your contacts via phone, email, face-to-face, or social media (your preference). Explain that you are researching career paths, and ask if he/she is working in XX field or if they know of anyone working in XX field (or with a particular agency) that you could ask questions about the field.

Attend UMD Employer Events: The University Career Center & The President’s Promise hosts employer related events (including career fairs, site visits, information sessions, etc.) that allow students to learn more and network with federal recruiters. Talk with recruiters to learn of upcoming openings, application tips and characteristics of the agency’s culture.
Attend Fairs: The hiring authorities within federal agencies sometimes attend career fairs to recruit talent and exercise their direct hire authority to interview applicants for mission critical positions. Recruiters have been known to conduct on the spot interviews and make job offers contingent on passing the background check. Some agencies will post recruiting schedules on their website, so check there for updates. Review your local newspaper’s career section to identify regional career fairs open to the public. Local organizations will also advertise career events (check out the career events listed on dcjobs.com).

Identify organizations the agency of interest works with: Once you develop this list (through networking, following the organization in the news, conducting Google searches, etc.), reach out to professionals in the partnering organizations to inquire about job opportunities or request an informational interview. The federal government is large, but some offices work closely with private sector businesses and state governments. You may consider pursuing opportunities in the private sector contracting area to gain more knowledge or work with a staffing agency that supports federal agencies (i.e. one example is Contemporaries in Silver Spring, MD).

Target agencies (and follow them)
Start following your “target agencies”. Sign-up for newsletters or subscribe to magazines that would allow you to become knowledgeable of the organization's leadership/mission and learn the “language” of that agency. The Washingtonian magazine for example will give you an insider’s peek at DC happenings.

Utilize social media
- Review USAJobs or Social Jobs Partnership Facebook page, to identify hiring trends, locate upcoming events and review screen shot tutorials.
- View informational videos on the USAJOBS You Tube Channel.
- Follow @USAJOBS on Twitter to ask OPM application questions or tips on using the USAJobs website. Search Twitter to locate your target agencies to learn about ongoing projects.
- Follow agencies of interest on LinkedIn’s “Companies” tool. If you have a LinkedIn account and connections, you may also view who your connections are connected to. Did you see anyone you know? Visit LinkedIn Alumni tool and search the “Where do they work” category by entering agencies of interest. Click the agencies you are interested in and alumni with that organization within their profile will appear.

Create encounters
- Once you have identified your field of interest, review DC Link Tank’s calendar of events to locate opportunities for you to engage with professionals in your field of interest.
- DC has a terrific after work scene. Young professionals visit area restaurants and attend after work events before heading home. Washington DC After Work offers occasional networking events. The Smithsonian also offers many events during a series entitled “After Five”.

Intern/Volunteer
The federal government offers students opportunities to gain work experience and meet employers. Students who work at least 640 hours with an organization before graduation are eligible for noncompetitive conversion to career-conditional employment. Start applying for these types of positions early in your undergraduate or graduate school tenure.
- Volunteer information
- Internship program