

# GOVLOOP CAREER GUIDE

## HOW TO FIND, LAND, KEEP, & LEAP



IN YOUR GOVERNMENT CAREER

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One of the hardest parts of finding government employment is just getting your foot in the door. Navigating the job application process presents numerous challenges to prospective government employees. Common challenges to finding government employment include understanding the grade and series qualifications, perfecting your resume, actually applying and then, finally, acing the interview.

Once you succeed in becoming a full-time government employee and settle into your position, new pressures become relevant. You may have taken that first job just to get some experience, and feel like you are being under utilized in your agency. Maybe you knew the hiring manager well or they were well respected in government, and you wanted to use that connection to help elevate your career. Once you are at the point where you want to advance your government career, where do you begin?

There are dozens of reasons why you may want to be looking for a new job in government -- you are starting a family and need the extra income, you desire a career change, you want a fresh start from your agency, or you are in need of a culture change. Whatever the reason may be, GovLoop has teamed up with expert career advisors to help you elevate your government career.

The goal of this guide is to help you elevate your government career to the next level. In this guide, we will walk you through strategies to help you find, land, keep and leap in your government career. GovLoop staff and career advisement experts have written this guide, and this guide will provide you with expert advice to help you advance in your government career.

We broke this guide down into four main topical areas. Although the guide touches on some issues specific to the federal government – this is certainly a valuable resource to state and local government employees and anyone considering government employment.

**FINDING THE RIGHT JOB**

Discover &amp; Achieve the Next Level

Here we provide you with an overview of the job search process and how to use your network to land a job. We also give you some strategies and best practices to overcome some common challenges during the job hunt process.

**LANDING THE RIGHT JOB**

Leave Nothing to Chance

This section will walk you through crafting the perfect resume, how to identify the right government job, writing your cover letter and provide you with some strategies and tips to get through roadblocks.

**KEEPING THE JOB**

Grow Where You Are

Here we will talk about what you can do in your current position to grow as a leader. We'll provide you with some on-the-job tips for getting the best projects, advice as to how to lead at your level, and influence without having authority.

**LEAPING**

Put Yourself in a Strategic Position

In the final section of the guide, we present information on how to join the SES and explain how executive coaching is one way to advance your government career, advice on how to transfer between the public and private sector and conclude with considerations if you should pursue higher education.

## ABOUT GOVLOOP

GovLoop's mission is to "connect government to improve government." We aim to inspire public sector professionals by serving as the knowledge network for government. GovLoop connects more than 55,000 members, fostering cross-government collaboration, solving common problems and advancing government careers.

The GovLoop community has been widely recognized across multiple sectors as a core resource for information sharing among public sector professionals. GovLoop members come from across the public sector; including federal, state, and local public servants, industry experts as well as non-profit, associations and academic partners. In brief, GovLoop is the leading online source for addressing public sector issues.

In addition to being an online community, GovLoop works with government experts and top industry partners to produce valuable resources and tools, such as guides, infographics, podcasts, online training and educational events, all to help public sector professionals do their jobs better. GovLoop also promotes public service success stories in popular news sources like the Washington Post, Huffington Post, Government Technology, and other industry publications.

### Location

GovLoop is headquartered in Washington D.C., where a team of dedicated professionals share a common commitment to connect and improve government.

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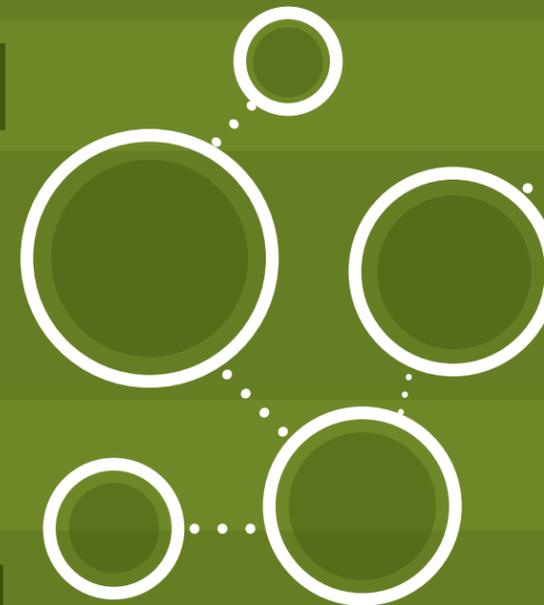
# FINDING THE RIGHT PEOPLE—

GROW

WHO

YOU

KNOW



### DO A PERSONAL ASSESSMENT

**We've all been there** – starting to look for a job and not knowing where to begin. Often we talk to our friends and family, reaching out to our personal and professional networks in hopes of learning about new professional opportunities. Before starting the actual job-hunting process, one of the best places to start is by spending some time thinking about what you want out of your career. Performing a self-assessment can provide some clarity to the job search, and allow you to focus the process. Knowing what kind of environment you want to work in, the type of position, and your income needs are some good starting points to finding the right job.

For starters, do a quick self-assessment for your job. Here is a quick exercise to get you thinking about your next opportunity:

- WHAT KIND OF QUALITIES DO YOU LOOK FOR IN A MANAGER?
- WHAT KIND OF WORK ENVIRONMENT DO YOU EXCEL IN?
- WHAT KIND OF WORK DO YOU REALLY ENJOY DOING?
- WHAT IS YOUR MANAGEMENT STYLE?
- WHAT SKILL SET WOULD LIKE TO IMPROVE ON?
- WHAT ARE YOUR FINANCIAL NEEDS?
- WHAT ARE YOUR PROFESSIONAL GOALS IN 3-5 YEARS? WILL THE NEW POSITION ALLOW YOU TO MEET THOSE OBJECTIVES?
- WHAT INSPIRES YOU? WHAT KIND OF PROJECTS GETS YOU MOTIVATED TO GET UP IN THE MORNING AND HEAD TO WORK?

Think critically about your answers and how they impact the kind of position you want. Once you start to narrow down your interests, passions and expectations of your new position – starting to find a job becomes a lot more focused and targeted.

## NETWORKING CHALLENGES

**Some people are networking stars;** others are a little more hesitant to get started with networking. All in all, being a good networker is a lot like finding the right fit for your position – take some time to think about what environment you network best in. A key to your networking success is that you need to be comfortable in the networking setting. For some, networking might work best at a happy hour. Others would prefer to take a more formal approach through informational interviews, so they can plan and do a little background research before meeting someone.

Camille Roberts mentioned on GovLop, “Some people equate networking with posting their “résumé” on LinkedIn or updating their Facebook status by writing they are looking for a job. GovLoop, LinkedIn, Facebook, BeKnown, BranchOut, Twitter, and other social media are all tools for connecting, sharing, and engaging. Unless you pick up the hammer and hit the nail, nothing is going to get built.” To really get the most out of your network, you are going to have to be strategic and make sure you are truly engaging with those in your network.

**AT THIS POINT IN YOUR CAREER, YOU HAVE PROBABLY BEEN TO COUNTLESS HAPPY HOURS, GRABBED DOZENS OF BUSINESS CARDS, AND BUILT UP A PRETTY STRONG NETWORK. NOW, AS YOU START TO EVALUATE YOUR NEXT STEP – YOU NEED TO START USING THOSE CONTACTS IN A MORE STRUCTURED AND EFFICIENT WAY.**

In Camille Roberts blog post, “Which Technique Could Help You Land a Job Faster? – Networking or Connecting?,” Camille provides some great strategies to help you quickly land a job through networking. Camille reminds us that “Most of us understand networking as attending an event, introducing ourselves, exchanging business cards or contact information, and chatting for a few minutes. Often, we try to visit with as many people as possible—and forget some of them afterward because we did not engage enough to make a connection.”

That is part of the problem with networking, sometimes we are not really engaging with those we are attempting to network with. Exchanging a business card and having a quick conversation, sometimes isn’t enough to really connect. Camille states, “If we invest just a little more time with perhaps even fewer people, we can start to develop a meaningful, long-lasting relationship. It could be a follow-up email or phone call to remind them of your conversation then offer to meet them for lunch or coffee. After the initial contact, we can build on the connection and stay in touch via social media, but consistent follow-up and engagement is the key to success in connecting.”

## ASSOCIATE WITH OTHER RISING LEADERS

One of the best ways to meet people with similar interests and aspirations is to join a member-based association. There are scores of these organizations that relate to government and it’s difficult to choose which one is right for you. Take another look at your answers to the initial questions in the self-assessment. Those responses should help you narrow down the type of association that would

help you connect with the right people.

Another way to start to associate with rising leaders is to set up informational interviews. Setting up informational interviews can be enormously beneficial for a prospective employee. Start off by doing some research about leaders in your areas of interest, and then send a simple email request, asking to meet up and talk about their profession. Be direct; make sure you say that you are currently looking for a position. If a position is not available, still be sure to try and arrange a meeting.

## BUILD A MENTOR-MENTEE RELATIONSHIP

Mentors are an important part of advancing your career. If you have a mentor, talk openly about career options and seek their advice. They hold a wealth of knowledge, and will be happy to assist you in your career.

The process of finding a mentor is often confusing for employees. Some organizations set up a formal program to match young employees with more senior level employees. Other places mentors are encouraged, but in a much more informal setting. If you are looking for a mentor in your organization and things tend to be less formal, the best thing you can do is just start to set up meetings with senior level officials. It will never hurt you to show some initiative and try to meet up with people to learn from their experience.

Finding your mentor is not an easy process. So what makes a good mentor? Pat Fiorenza writes on GovLoop that “Mentors often provide valuable insights and institutional knowledge about an orga-

nization to a younger workforce. By working with a mentor, new employees are given new perspectives on organizational issues and are provided the opportunity to grow professionally and learn from their mentor's experiences."

Sitting down and making a list of qualities that you look for in a mentor is a great first step to identifying who in your organization might make a good mentor. If you are entering into a formal or informal

relationship mentor relationship, the most important thing is that your mentor is a great fit for you, and they possess the traits you look for in a mentor. Pat identified his top 10 qualities he looked for in a mentor:

1. PROVIDE CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK (POSITIVE & NEGATIVE)
2. SUPPORTIVE OF MY PROJECTS/WORK
3. MAKES TIME FOR ME
4. PAYS CLOSE ATTENTION TO MY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
5. CREATES NEW OPPORTUNITIES IN CAREER
6. ALLOWS ME TO MAKE CONNECTIONS/BUILD PROFESSIONAL NETWORK
7. KNOWS MY STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES, SETS ME UP FOR SUCCESS
8. LEADS BY EXAMPLE
9. HIGH LEVEL KNOWLEDGE ON ORGANIZATION AND FIELD THEY WORK IN
10. CONNECT ON A PERSONAL LEVEL

Developing a mentor-mentee relationship has many benefits. By becoming a mentor, you help employees advance their career and allow them to tap into your institutional knowledge, as a mentee you are given a unique chance to learn from experiences and incorporate them into your own professional development.

## USING SOCIAL MEDIA TO NETWORK AND ADVANCE YOUR CAREER



**It is possible that you will meet your next boss at a social event.**

Why wait until the next happy hour or networking event you attend? What if you could make powerful,

professional, network-building connections every day? By effectively using social media, you can. This section will help you capitalize on social media platforms such as Twitter, LinkedIn, GovLoop, and Facebook. The overall theme for this section is that you need to be strategic and smart with how you are using social media. What you post on the web is your identity, so you really should not be posting content that you believe will jeopardize your ability to land your dream job. Social media is a great way for you to stand out from other applicants. Social media could also instantly remove you from contention from your dream position. You need to be careful about what you are posting, and a good rule of thumb is if you don't want someone to see content you post, don't post. It's that simple.

## PERSONAL BRANDING STRATEGY

Having a personal online branding strategy is an important element to growing your career. Social media allows you to connect with so many people in your industry and to advance your career, it is important that you start to distinguish yourself as a thought leader. Using Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and GovLoop, you can set yourself up to be viewed as a leader in your field. It may sound overwhelming to manage all these different accounts, but adding a little maintenance to your social media identity can go a long way in helping you to advance your career.

### Using Twitter to Network

Becoming a thought leader in your community requires you to take a strategic approach. Using Twitter is one part of the



puzzle. You should be tweeting regularly and sharing content appropriate for your field. Make sure you tweet consistently, and utilize hashtags that will connect you to leaders in your field.

The web is flooded with information about how to use Twitter and related best practices. Be sure to check out our resources section in this guide that will send you to the best spots on GovLoop for Twitter resources.

One way to connect with leaders in your field is to engage by retweeting appropriate updates. By engaging with thought leaders through retweets, you will capture their attention and bring them to your page. This will help you build your brand, and build a relationship with leaders on Twitter.

ReTweets are not the only way to connect. Often people use Direct Messages (DM's) to connect in ways that would not be appropriate in a public forum. Typically, they are used in instances where information is discussed that should remain pri-

vate, such as exchanging contact information. Be sure to use your discretion, and if in doubt, a direct message is usually a safe bet.

There is often a debate on if you should make your tweets private or public. This really depends on your intentions and how you plan to use Twitter. If you would like to use Twitter to network, it is best to leave your profile public so more people can see and share your content. Just be considerate of what you are posting and how you want to be viewed online. Remember, you are building your personal brand, so keep it professional and do not post anything you would not want a prospective employer to see.

A final way to connect is the use of "@ messages." These are very similar to direct messages on Twitter. Use these if you are trying to quickly engage with someone publically. Good ways to use @ messages are to thank people if they retweeted a post or if you would like to join in a larger conversation.

## in Using LinkedIn to Network

Overall, you should treat LinkedIn as your online resume. Your connections should be able to get a solid grasp of your professional experience. The more contacts you have on LinkedIn, the higher your visibility. This makes it easier for hiring agencies in your job field to find your profile.

You should be inviting connections from LinkedIn from all levels of experience. A common strategy is when you send a request to connect, be sure to also include a message. This is especially true if the contact is a weak connection or you are looking to set up an informational interview. Let the person know why you are connecting, through a quick message.

On LinkedIn, there are **three levels of contact** you may have with individuals. (information below is

captured in the infographic on p. 15):

**Inner circle contacts** are people who you have prior and current professional contacts, clients, co-workers, supervisors, friends, professional association members, classmates, alumni from your school, professors, social group members, religious organization members, or service providers. One strategy to find all these people is to search your email contacts and send out requests to connect.

**Peripheral contacts** are friends of friends, people you've met briefly. They might have similar interests as you and could be a good resource for informational interviews and a source of growing your network.

**Prospects** are people you know of, but don't know you, prospects are in organizations on your target list, have job titles you envy/admire, might be in a position to either hire you, are super-connectors in the field, and/or accessible and likely to respond to your request.

One common mistake that people do on LinkedIn is to set up their profile, and never complete filling in your information. Be sure to completely fill out your profile on LinkedIn. Instead of just including your current job information, include all past jobs and a brief description of your job function. By including work experience, education, activities, and skills, you will have connections to more people you may know in your network.

**RECOMMENDATIONS ON LINKEDIN ARE IMPORTANT. WHEN COMPLETING YOUR LINKEDIN PROFILE, DON'T FORGET TO ASK PAST COWORKERS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS. IF YOU WANT A RECOMMENDATION FROM A CO-WORKER, A TIP IS TO WRITE A RECOMMENDATION FOR THEM FIRST, AND THEN ASK FOR ONE IN RETURN.**

Using Groups and Answers on LinkedIn are good tools and outlets to get legitimate advice from people in your industry, as well as to display your own expertise. By answering others' questions you will be seen by everyone on the thread. This information will also show on your profile, which will display your knowledge and expertise within your field.

## USING GOVLOOP TO NETWORK AND YOUR JOB SEARCH

GovLoop is a social networking site for government employees, and so, by default, members of the site have some overlapping professional interests. When posting content it is good to share your opinion, but make it clear that you are speaking on behalf of yourself, not your employer.

GovLoop strives to connect professionals, so it is not odd if you "friend" someone after discussing a topic with them or enjoy reading their blogs. Additionally, it would be good to friend someone if you are interested in their work or have specific questions for them.

The easiest way to discover connections on GovLoop is go to the "Members" page, and use the "Advanced Search." You can search for members by Name, Title, Current Agency or Organization, or even Educational Background.



### GOVGIGS

As part of our "GovGigs" initiatives, GovLoop offers four key services and tools to accelerate your career advancement, Rock Your Resume, GovLoop Mentors Program, Online Trainings/Resources, and Jobs.GovLoop.com.

## ROCK YOUR RESUME

GovLoop hosts a project called "Rock Your Resume" which secures the expertise of two top-notch expert reviewers who are conducting limited resume reviews each month. It is a free service offered exclusively to GovLoop members. Here's how it works:

- 1 BECOME A MEMBER OF GOVLOOP (IF YOU AREN'T ALREADY)
- 2 JOIN THE "ROCK YOUR RESUME GROUP"
- 3 SUBMIT YOUR RESUME ALONG WITH SOME CONTEXT FOR THE REVIEWS.
- 4 THEY OFFER A REVIEW: YOU POST YOUR EDITED RESUME SO THAT OTHER MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY CAN LEARN FROM THE PROCESS.

The program has been very successful, and it's always nice having a fresh pair of eyes to take a look at your resume. Here are some of our success stories:

- *Government Resume Makeover: Jacob Hoots Edition*
- *Government Resume Makeover: Christman, Flynn and Kugler Edition*
- *Government Resume Makeover: Bradley Olin Edition*

## MENTORS PROGRAM

The GovLoop Mentors Program is a first-of-its-kind, government-wide initiative that connects public sector professionals across agencies and at every level (Federal, state and local) of government. This free program responds to the unprecedented need for effective knowledge transfer and leadership development throughout government.

With the impending departure of Baby Boomers from the workforce and the need to transfer knowledge from one generation of public servants to the next, there's one idea that arises again and

again: "there ought to be a government--wide mentoring program." Of course, there are several excellent mentor programs in individual agencies and at the state and local level, but there is nothing available on a larger scale -- a massive mentoring project that connects people from every level of government with seasoned leaders and peers who can offer insight and advice to help each other advance in their careers. For more information, check out the GovLoop Mentors Program.

## FREE ONLINE TRAINING / RESOURCES

GovLoop frequently hosts free, hour-long, career-related, online trainings that offer strategies to help you in your career. Here are some examples:

### Archives of Free Online Training

- *"Get That Gov Gig: How To Network in a Tricky Job Environment"*
- *"How Stunning Storytelling Can Advance Your Government Career"*

## JOBS.GOVLOOP.COM

Finally, GovLoop recently launched a new site designed to make it easier for you to narrow down potential job matches. Every week, you can receive 10 new jobs in one of several functional areas: acquisition, budgeting, communications, generalist, human resources, information technology and even \$100,000+ jobs. We've also consolidated all of the above resources in one place to make it easy to find all of your career advancement resources.

## BLOGGING – BECOME A THOUGHT LEADER

By blogging about your topic of expertise on GovLoop, you will be able to capture the attention of other government employees in your community of interest. Through discussions over current is-

ues, you will be able to connect with others in your field, which could form a foundation for collaboration in later projects.

## Facebook Etiquette and Networking

Out of all of the social media websites, Facebook is by far the most sensitive when it comes to networking. Facebook is inherently more personal, which can create confusion when it comes to adding coworkers.

A common question asked about Facebook is if you **should friend coworkers**.

Everybody has different definitions for what they consider to be a "Facebook friend". While some people have large friend lists and partially use Facebook as a networking tool, many people like to limit their friend list to a closer group of personal connections.

GovLoop member Paul Homan's blog post, "Be-friending Co-Workers: Good Idea, Bad Idea?," highlighted some of the perspectives when it comes to friending co-workers.

Some GovLoop members believed it was acceptable to add co-workers on Facebook, as long as you are cautious about what you share. "I think friending is okay between co-workers – and even after you do so, you can adjust your privacy settings so that they can only see certain information," said

Andrew Krzmarzick. "Where I do think it gets a little dicey is friending your boss or vice versa."

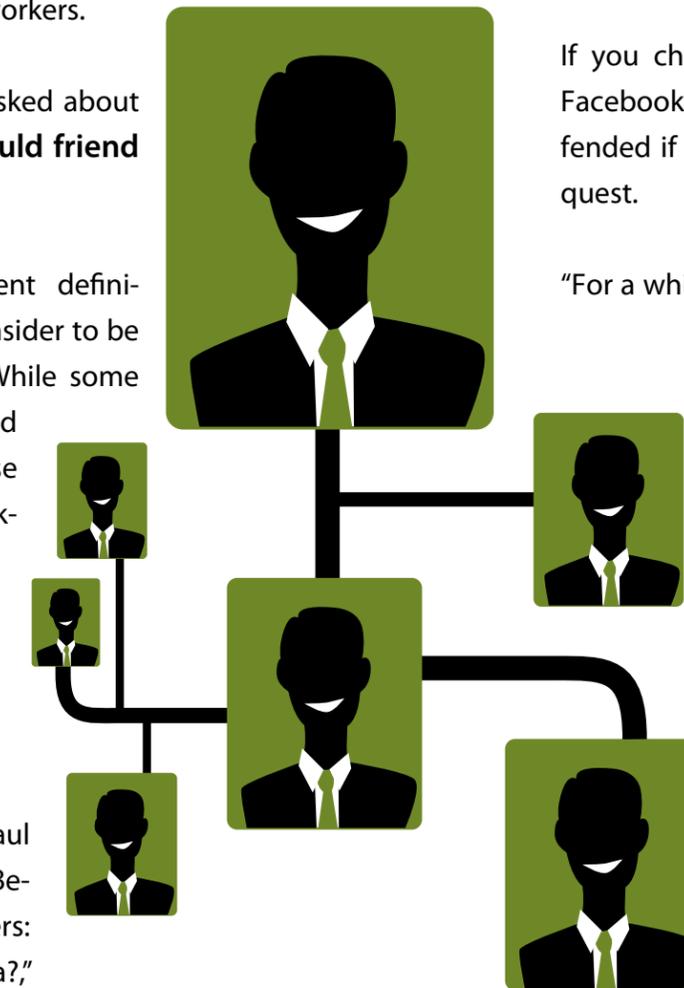
Katelyn Keegan agreed that it could be awkward choosing to add co-workers or supervisors as "friends" on Facebook. "We have several senior government officials who like to friend everyone in our agency. We also have a few senior government employees who refuse to friend anyone in the office."

If you choose to add coworkers on Facebook, be careful and don't be offended if they do not accept your request.

"For a while I had a number of my coworkers and colleagues who were in my age bracket (there are only 5 of us under 30) and my immediate coworkers," Keegan continued. "However, recently I got the un-friend bug and deleted about 90% of my friend list on Facebook – the blow back of being removed is probably just as bad ignoring the initial invite to start with."

In the end, whether or not you should friend co-workers should be determined on a case-by-case basis. "It depends on the work culture," said James E. Evans, MISM. "In my workspace, there is not a lot of friending. I would follow the landscape of the culture."

Privacy settings are also another area to pay attention to on Facebook. Sometimes it is difficult





# LANDING THE JOB

LEAVE  
NOTHING  
TO  
CHANCE



**Once you have completed step one of finding the right people to help you decide your next move, now your atten-**

**tion shifts to landing the job.** You've networked, you've researched the position, and now you are ready to get your application in order and prepare for the interview.

## RESUME

Resumes are always difficult to get perfect. Each resume needs to be tailored to a specific position and you also need to have a resume on hand if you are attending a job fair or networking event.

GovLoop member Paul Binkley provides a lot of great resources for those looking to elevate their career through his GovLoop blog. One common challenge that you may face as a jobseeker is crafting your resume for a job that might be slightly out of reach based on your experiences. In Paul Binkley's blog, "[How Do I hit a Bullseye Without a Target?](#)", Paul advises you to apply and write your resume for the position, even if they might be beyond your reach. "When you do this for "stretch" positions -- those jobs that may be just out of your reach -- you will include all the right skills, key words, and accomplishments that will be familiar to the positions you can apply to," Paul advises.

In another recent post by Paul, "[Don't Fall Into the Simple Math Trap: Use the 80% Rule](#)," Paul expresses the need to apply to targeted positions. USAJobs has thousands of jobs posted, and knowing which ones to apply too is no easy task. Paul warns not to fall into the simple math trap, or "the more I apply to, the better my chances are." Paul recommends quality over quantity, and using your time wisely as you complete your applications for positions.

"In my mind, quality trumps quantity 99 times out of a 100 for so many reasons, not the least of which is how much time and effort it takes to submit a really good application. In other words, it's best to apply to those positions that relate most closely to your interests and abilities. Too often, though, it is difficult to identify from the job announcement how well you fit with a particular position."

## COVER LETTERS

Cover letters are often another area that challenges prospective employees. Writing skills are critical in any profession. Even if your position does not require you to write a cover letter, keeping your writing skills sharp is a great idea.

We'll give you a template on how to model your cover letter, but for now, here are some quick tips:

- For non-academic positions, keep it to one page
- Show something new, don't just rehash your resume
- The goal of a cover letter is to prove that you are the best candidate for the job
- Another goal is to show off your writing skills, proof-read and do not let any grammatical errors slip by.
- Phrases like "I have attached my resume" or "My resume shows" are clunky; the employer knows what it shows, tell them something new
- Be clear and concise
- Write to your audience

## BUILDING THE BETTER BURGER: COVER LETTERS

GovLoop Blog by Paul Binkley

Here's the structure I suggest for your cover letter (and I like using block paragraph format--saves space and looks clean):

**Your Street Address** (notice your name is not here)

**Your City, State and Zip**

[one space]

**Date**

[one space]

**Contacts Name, Title**

**Organization**

**Street Address**

**City, State and Zip**

[one space]

**Salutation** (avoid "Dear" and write "Mr. Smith:" or "Ms. Doe:" -- do not use "Mrs." If you don't know the person's name, even after diligently searching for it, write "To Whom It May Concern:")

**Paragraph 1** (Intro, two sentences):

- **Sentence one**--This is your grabber statement. It serves as your chance to tell the employer how you heard of the position and/or mention a personal connection you have with the organization.
- **Sentence two**--This is your thesis and tells the reader what you are about to prove and in which order. It should be direct and confident without being arrogant or wishy-washy. You have the skills/abilities they need and you are going to prove that to your prospective employer in this letter.

Here is an example:

"Brian Adams, the director of environmental policy office, recently told me of the Management Analyst position in the Human Capital Office. My research, analysis, and project management abilities make me an excellent candidate for this position."

Paragraphs 2-4 (Body Paragraphs):

- These paragraphs support your thesis NOT by summarizing your resume, but by making connections for the employer and they must be in the order you gave in your thesis.
- The most important part of these paragraphs is their topic sentences.

It may seem silly that I'm mentioning the importance of topic sentences, but I've seen far too many bad ones to skip this.

Each topic sentence should tell the reader what the paragraph is about. Simple? Of course.

Too often though, we box ourselves in or we don't stick to the topic at hand. For example, from our thesis example above, the first body paragraph should be about research. Here is a Goldilocks look at possible topic sentences:

- Too broad: "Research has played a big part in my life."
- Too specific: "While working as the research assistant at the Department of Commerce, I developed strong research skills." -- this sentence says you will talk ONLY about this experience.
- Just right: "Throughout my professional and academic careers, I developed strong research abilities."

The last example, gives you the ability to talk about how professional and academic experiences relate to you research abilities. You could talk about past work, volunteer opportunities, class group work, etc.

- These paragraphs often are 3-6 sentences, but can be longer or shorter (never just one sentence though).

Paragraph 5 (Conclusion: 2-4 sentences):

- The first sentence of this paragraph is a restatement of your thesis: "Given my research, analysis, and project management abilities, I know I am an excellent candidate for the Management Analyst position."
- This paragraph should end with you thanking them for their time, but it can also include transitional thoughts like "I look forward to learning more about this position with a personal interview" or "I will contact your office in two weeks to verify you received my application." These are not necessary.
- You can also include your contact information in this paragraph, but it is not necessary.

[one space]

Sincerely,

[2-4 spaces]

Your signature Do not include "Enclosures" at the end. That's not necessary and takes up space.

There it is, your effective cover letter.

## PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

The moment is here; you have perfected your resume and cover letter, and now you are preparing for an interview. The interview is the culmination of all your hard work.

There are lots of resources available on how to prepare for an interview. Across all of them, a common thread is, **be confident**. You have beat out dozens, maybe even hundreds, of applicants for the position. The hiring manager saw some potential in you and decided they wanted to learn more.

Feeling nervous before an interview is something usually faced by everyone. By preparing for the interview, you can quickly get past your nerves and stand out as the most capable applicant. GovLoop has tons of great resources on how you can ace your interview. Heather Krasna provides the GovLoop community with her *“Top 5 Tips to Prepare for Interviews in the 21st Century.”*

**Tip 1: Use the job description to anticipate questions.** Heather advises to “come with an arsenal of your best stories. Beyond the standard interview questions (“Tell me about yourself,” “Why should we hire you,” “what is your weakness”), which hundreds of other bloggers and books have covered, you should read the job description carefully and turn the requirements into questions.”

This is a great strategy, and allows you to focus and prepare yourself for specific requirements of the job. If the position is requiring a certain skill, think of a solid example from your past experience. The more you can prepare and anticipate, the more comfortable you will be in the interview, and the better you can show you are the best ap-

plicant for the position.

**Tip 2: Use LinkedIn to research the interviewers; and use LinkedIn to research your predecessor.** Heather advises, “Read the person’s profile and look for their keywords, educational background, etc. Also, search for your predecessor. Does everyone in the department have similar backgrounds? If you know they all have worked for the same company in the past, can you research that company as well?”

**Tip 3: Understand the employer.** Organizations post a ton of information about their organization online. Do your best to find out as much as you can about the agency, and use this knowledge to inform your answers to your questions.

**Tip 4: Consider a 30/60/90 day plan.** Heather states, “Consider putting together your plan of action— what you would do, if hired, in the first 3 months of the job.” This is a great way to show that you are ready to hit the ground running the second you start your new position.

The final action item is to practice. Keep on practicing common interview questions, anticipate new ones, and maybe even run through them with a colleague. Through practice and hard work; you will set yourself up to ace the interview.

**Tip 5: Be sure that you send out a thank-you for the interview.** This is a critical final step. Make sure you send a thank you email after your interview. Although it seems trivial, it makes a big impact. People will remember if they were thanked for their time and interview. If you neglect to send a thank you, you are automatically putting yourself at a disadvantage. The email is quick and easy to write.

## NEGOTIATE THE SALARY

For good reasons, many people find negotiating a salary an intimidating process. When you are considering accepting a position, salary negotiations will inevitably occur. The first step is that you should feel great about receiving a job offer and celebrate that you have an offer on the table. Once the initial offer comes, what should your next step be? You clearly want to start off on good terms, so you do not want to be viewed as pushy and get into a long, drawn-out debate about salary. You want to start off on good terms with your employer.

Likewise, you want to be able to set a precedent for future negotiations. For many job applicants, the job search process feels exhausting, and once you finally get an offer, your first reaction is to jump and accept the money. For a couple reasons, you should consider taking a few deep breaths, celebrating the offer and then consider making a counter. Most salaries have some kind of flexibility, and just by asking – you may be able to get an increase. Although negotiating a salary is a stressful and intimidating process, it is important to do.

## TIPS FOR NEGOTIATING SALARY

1. Perform some basic research and find out what the average salary is in field with your educational background and experience
2. Prepare as if it is another interview, be sure to think about potential questions and limitations to your counter offer
3. Be direct and honest with your needs during the negotiation
4. Never talk about anyone else’s earnings or financial position except your own
5. Make your case and talk about your qualifications and what you bring to the organization
6. Do not allow the negotiation to turn into a conflict
7. Don’t make the entire conversation a salary negotiation (sounds odd, right) – but make sure you are making it clear that your salary negotiation is taking place so you can grow professionally. Make it clear you are invested with the organization.
8. Avoid hard language and ultimatums – this kind of language takes you into dangerous waters and you want to start off on the right foot at your organization.
9. Make sure you are negotiating with the right person and someone who has authority to increase your offer.
10. Timing is critical. Don’t start negotiating after you accept the offer – try to keep some leverage.

Take these tips to heart, and remember that a key element to all of this is confidence. Be confident in who you are, your talents, and what you bring to the table. A good manager will remember the days when they were negotiating and how stressful it could be. There is nothing wrong with negotiating. For many employers, they want employees who take pride in what they do, pride in themselves, and will contribute immediately. A salary negotiation is a good litmus test of how your relationship will develop with your new employer.



# KEEPING THE JOB

GROW  
WHERE  
YOU  
ARE



**Now, the real fun starts.** You are all settled into your job, you are looking to get more involved in projects, take some leadership opportunities and grow professionally.

## GETTING ON THE RIGHT PROJECTS

When you start at a new organization your priorities become learning how to best navigate the organizational culture and doing high level, impactful work. There are a lot of different ways to get on projects that will show off your skill set and help you do meaningful work. Getting on the right projects is key to you advancing your career and growing professionally.

GovLoop member Carol Davidson frames the issue well on GovLoop, "You never want to be thought of as annoying or arrogant. Nor should you wait quietly. Do as Rampulstilskin did, spin straw into gold." Dave Dejewski also recommends that you start taking some initiative and actively search for exciting projects.

David reminds us:

**I'M BIG ON TAKING INITIATIVE - VERY IMPORTANT FOR PROMOTION. SET UP A HUMAN NETWORK SO YOU'RE NOT BEING A COWBOY OR OVER DOING IT, BUT LOOK FOR HOLES AND FILL THEM - THEN COMMUNICATE. THERE IS AN EXCEPTION TO EVERY RULE. IF YOU FIND YOURSELF IN AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE TAKING INITIATIVE IS NOT ENCOURAGED, OR IF YOU FIND THAT TAKING INITIATIVE IS IGNORED OR PUNISHED, THEN IN MY OPINION, IT MAY BE TIME TO MOVE ON. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EMPLOYEE AND SUPERVISOR NEEDS TO BE HEALTHY. IF IT'S NOT, YOU MAY FIND ANOTHER ENVIRONMENT MORE REWARDING.**

Another key to getting on the right projects is having open communication with your supervisor. One way to do this is by setting up periodic check-ins. Talk to your new supervisor often and in a meaningful way. Communicate clearly how you are adapting in your new role, your priorities and ask for feedback on your performance (positive/negative). Your manager will likely set up these meetings for you early on, but if they do not start

to happen after the first two or three months of being on the job, just send your manager a note asking that you would like to give an update on your first few months. This is also a great time for you to share some of your successes and leverage the opportunity to be placed in different projects.

## FIRST TIME MANAGER

Being a first time manager is exciting. It is also challenging. As you settle into being a new manager, think back to when you were the employee. How did different management techniques impact you? What were some things about previous managers you liked or disliked? You are just learning your management style and technique, so take some time to think back and learn from your experiences from previous managers. There is a lot you can learn from them, especially by identifying their weaknesses and learning from their strengths.

Here are some quick tips from the GovLoop community for first time managers:

### Set Ground Rules

Make it clear how things will operate. If you want a meeting to start at 9AM, start it at 9AM. Set up some basic processes regarding how communication will work. Be honest and seek input as to how the team will operate.

### Lead By Example

People are looking to you and your leadership. If you want your employees to wear a suit and tie, don't show up in jeans and a t-shirt and expect your staff to dress differently.

### Don't Be Afraid to Admit Failures

"A leader should be telling the team what he or she learned from the failure. This makes it more

than an exercise in false humility but the true learning and growth experience it should be.” – Bill Brantley

If you make a mistake early on, don't be afraid to admit your failure and chart out ways you are looking to improve.

### Grow Your Team Professionally

Get to know your employees and listen to their professional goals.

You'll need to know what they are passionate about and interested in to keep up morale.

A good leader will pay close attention to not just the team's goals as an organization, but also individual goals. Provide opportunities for your employees to meet new people and grow their network.

### Trust Employees

When you're new, there will be a lot of learning that you will have to do about the organization. Trust your employees to make the right call, listen to their advice and stand behind them if something goes wrong.

### Tap Into Your Employees' Institutional Knowledge

Some employees have been around for a long time and they know the ropes. There is a lot you can learn from them. A good manager knows that they do not have all the answers and works with their team collectively.

### Provide Feedback Promptly

Don't let feedback slip and not get back to employees. It's damaging to morale and you need to

show that you're invested in your employees. If you are shooting in and out of meetings and not providing timely feedback, you will be giving off the wrong impression to your new employees.

People understand you will be busy, but you need to keep your team as your first priority. Be sure to let them know that you are listening to them and invested in their career.

### Celebrate Team Success & Learn the Best Ways to Motivate Your Team

Make sure you share your success as a team. Let the team know that their work is helping you achieve your ultimate mission. As a leader, it will be critical to inspire your team to act and make sure you are growing your team's chemistry.

Motivating your employees is not something that you can learn overnight. People are complex, and learning the best way to manage is really challenging. GovLoop member Joe Williams shares a

personal account of a successful employee reward program, “A number of years ago I started an internal award for recognizing a team member who goes above and beyond. The difference was that it wasn't I, the team leader, who decided the recipient. Instead, it was a peer-driven award. The recognition is via a plaque posted in the team area with engraved plates of the names of the award recipients, plus an announcement on the larger organization's website. I'm pleased to see that the award is continuing, even after I've since long moved to a new assignment. That tells me it's working.”



Bonus and promotions are ways to motivate employees, but motivation is much more complex than just cutting people a check. Monetary bonuses are not the only way to get encourage high-level performance.

GovLoop Community Manager Andy Krzmarzick also shared his thought about how to motivate employees – “I think monetary rewards are seen as a baseline - almost expected by knowledge workers. And they get it and shrug; but if you don't give one, it's a huge demotivator. It's almost like you have to give it just to maintain status quo.”

Terry Hill followed up on Andy's comments and provided some additional thoughts about motivating employees, “I'm a fan of more frequent, earned awards (cash or not doesn't matter) that come from either peers or customers. These are often more memorable, meaningful, and motivational. There are lots of variations that will work - On-The-Spot Cash, Special Act Awards, Time-Off Awards, Non-Monetary, etc. You can still limit the total to 1% of annual salary, but get a lot more motivational mileage.”

**“IF YOU ARE NOT COMFORTABLE WITH YOURSELF, YOU WILL NEVER BE COMFORTABLE IN OTHER RELATIONSHIPS; THAT INCLUDES PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS. IF YOU CANNOT MANAGE YOUR OWN LIFE, TIME MANAGEMENT, FINANCES, WORK/SELF-BALANCE, ETC. YOU WILL ALWAYS BE LIKE SISYPHUS PUSHING THAT ROCK UP THAT MOUNTAIN.”**

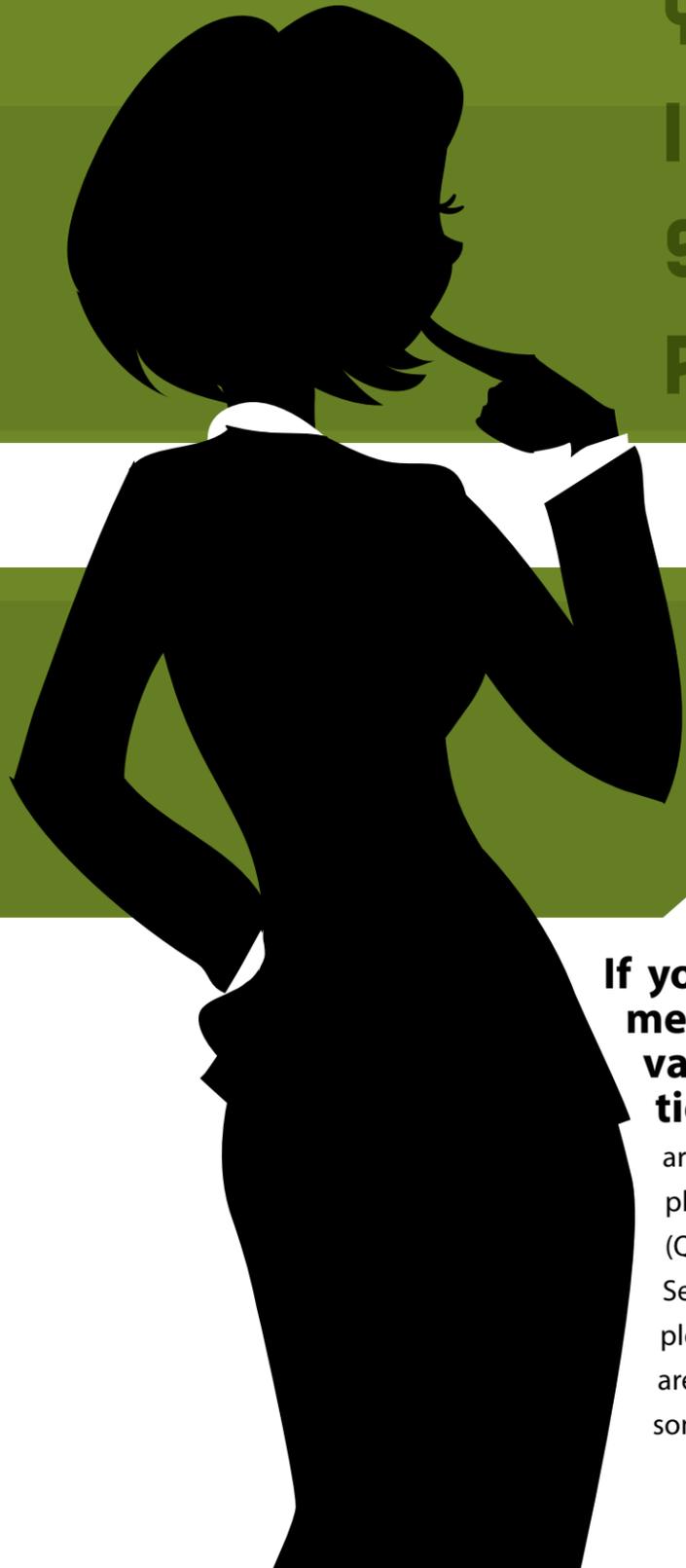
- Paul Alberti on GovLoop

There are so many resources dedicated to leadership. Across them all, the lesson is that great leaders are always finding new ways to grow professionally and ways to motivate their employees. A lot of leadership starts with yourself and understanding your management style. Leaders constantly reflect on their actions and try to find the best way to lead their group.

One of the tricks of becoming a good leader is learning how to self manage. Dave Dejewski reminds us “Every good leader must first learn to be a good follower.” Dave contends that self-management is a core responsibility of a leader. Dave states, “It's [self-management] usually billed as time management, self-discipline, diplomacy, dressing for success - and a bunch of other personal “self-help” labels. However, it is possibly the most important level to master for anyone wishing to be a leader - and therefore, it is a critical level of leadership in itself. It never goes away!”

# LEAPING

PUT  
YOURSELF  
IN A  
STRATEGIC  
POSITION



**If you are looking to take your government career to the next level and advance your career, there are a lot of options and ideas for consideration.**

If you are a federal employee, some options to advance are to explore ways to increase grades, seek a quality step increase (QSI), move to a new job, apply to join the Senior Executive Service, make a lateral move to change your position, and explore temporary assignments or special appointments. There are a lot of options to consider; this section will expand upon some of your options.

## ADVANCE YOUR CAREER THROUGH EXECUTIVE COACHING

Another option is to explore Executive Coaching. Lee Salmon of GovLoop shared his thoughts on the importance of executive coach in his post, "What is the Value of Coaching in These Uncertain Times."

Recently I've been reflecting on the value and importance of coaching and how it supports the development of leadership during the chaotic times in which we find ourselves. There is no question that government leaders today find their roles and responsibilities changing, and things that were once stable and enduring are no longer so. One of the values of coaching is to have a thought partner, a trusted advisor, who can help you sort through conflicting issues and demands in a safe and confidential way. A coach can ask you provocative questions that stimulate your ability to think strategically and gain new perspective.

My coaching conversations with clients have recently involved underlying issues such as volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity- VUCA. According to Wikipedia, VUCA "is an acronym used to describe or reflect on the volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity of general conditions and situations. The common usage of the term VUCA began in the late 1990s and derives from military vocabulary and has been subsequently used in emerging ideas in strategic leadership that apply in a wide range of organizations, including everything from for-profit corporations to education... These elements present the context in which organizations view their current and future state... how they make decisions, plan forward, manage risks, foster change and solve problems." Each of the VUCA issues, alone and together, can

increase a leader's level of stress and anxiety. A coach can help provide strategies to understand and manage these emotional challenges.

Not only are leaders expected to provide vision and direction for their organizations, but to do so with some sense of clarity when the playing field is shifting and the horizon is hazy. In addition, there is an increasing trend of senior executives and managers retiring and leaving government. This can exacerbate an already existing sense of loneliness being at the top and can cloud and sometimes blind a leader's perspective. There may no longer remain key trusted senior managers with experience and perspective to help one look ahead and craft a shared vision for the future.

A coach can help provide strategies and expand a leader's thinking about possibilities for collaboration, networks of support, and ways of engaging the whole organization to find products and services that are practical, customer relevant, and likely to succeed.

Another challenge of leadership today is to recruit, train, and retain leadership talent. This requires a deep understanding of one's own leadership strengths, styles, and weaknesses. Being able to span the range of needs and interests in a multi-generational workforce is not easy and requires new learning. The ability to grow and learn is best modeled if leadership is to be relevant and effective. A coach can help discover a leader's strengths and weaknesses using targeted assessments to uncover preferred ways of learning and then customize a personalized development plan accordingly.

These are just a few areas where coaching can be helpful to leaders who are in the midst of VUCA. I

For more information on coaching and leading during VUCA times, please go to the following links:

<http://libraryofprofessionalcoaching.com/concepts/best-practices-foundations/the-roots-and-emergence-of-coaching/>

<http://www.coachingconsortium.org/Events.html>

## MOVING BETWEEN SECTORS

Deciding between the public and private sector is a complex decision. Many people are drawn to the public sector for a desire to provide for the public good and make an impact in the community. This desire also exists in the private sector. In the end, most people want to be in a profession where they feel they are having a direct impact in an area they are passionate about.

Throughout this guide we have talked about your values and an understanding of what you desire out of your career. Coming from the private sector, there will be differences, but as you make the transition, it is important that you do so without any preconceived notions about how the public sector operates.

GovLoop member Peter Sperry shares his experience about transitioning between sectors: "I can say one of the most valuable aspects of the transitions is learning to appreciate the contributions of each and discard all the preconceived notions one builds up. I would also point out these sectors are very large and experiences vary."

Heather Krasna's blog, "[Transitioning from Private to Public Sector](#)," provides some great insights as

to public sector employment. Heather reminds us that before considering making the move to the public sector, "It's important to consider whether your personality is a good fit for government, whether you are considering transitioning for the right reasons, and whether your skills would match well with government jobs."

## SENIOR EXECUTIVE SERVICE

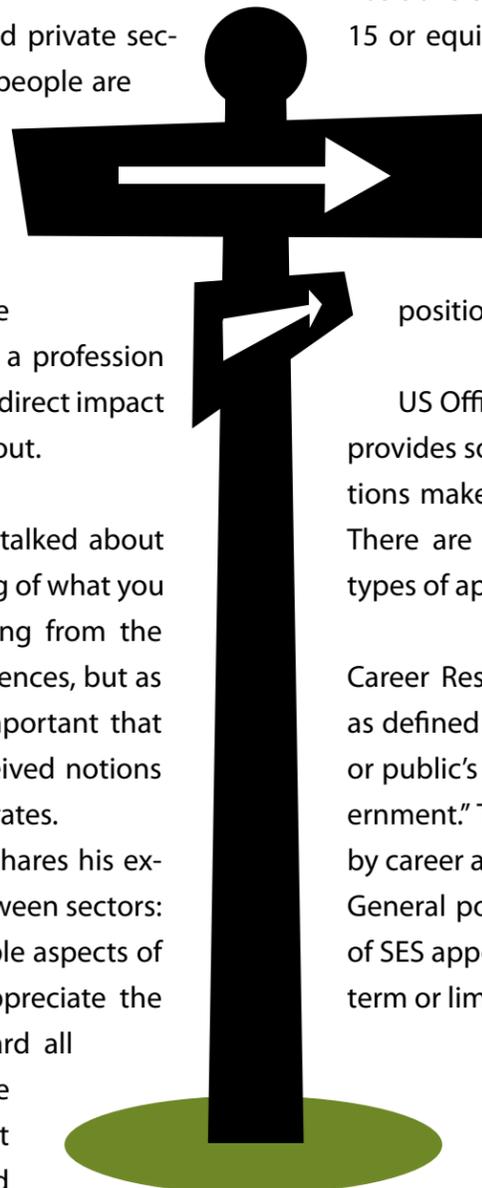
Positions classified above GS Schedule grade 15 or equivalent in the Executive Branch of the Federal Government are considered Senior Executive Service positions. SES opportunities are predominantly managerial and supervisory positions.

US Office of Personnel and Management provides some insights on what kind of positions make up the Senior Executive Service. There are two types of positions and four types of appointments in the SES.

Career Reserved positions are those which, as defined in law, are "to ensure impartiality, or public's confidence of impartiality of government." These positions can only be filled by career appointees.

General positions may be filled by any type of SES appointee -- career, noncareer, limited term or limited emergency.

Career appointments may be to a General or Career Reserved position; rights of the individual are the same in either case. Incumbents are selected by agency merit staffing process and must have their executive qualifications approved by a Qualifications Review Board (QRB)



convened by OPM.

Noncareer appointments are approved by OPM on a case-by-case basis and the appointment authority reverts to OPM when the noncareer appointee leaves the position. Appointments may be made only to General positions and cannot exceed 25% of the agency's SES position allocation. Governmentwide, only 10% of SES positions may be filled by noncareer appointees.

A Limited Term appointment may be made for up to 3 years, is nonrenewable and must be to an SES General position which will expire because of the nature of the work (e.g., a special project).

A Limited Emergency appointment is also a non-renewable appointment, may be for up to 18 months, and must be to an SES General position established to meet a bona-fide, unanticipated, urgent need.

The total number of limited appointments may not exceed 5% of SES positions allocated Governmentwide. Each agency has a pool equal to 3% of its allocation for making limited appointments of career or career-type employees from outside the SES. OPM must approve use of this type of appointment authority in other cases.

The information from the SES section came from OPM's website, if you would like more information about the SES, be sure to check out the [OPM website](#).

## PURSuing HIGHER EDUCATION

"Like good baked goods, education can balance and enhance our lives. In excess or when we become dependent on it, it can be unhealthy"

– GovLoop Member, David Dejewski.

Deciding whether to pursue higher education, credentialing programs, or seek other ways to be educated is not an easy decision. There are a lot of factors that come into play. By going back to school, you are making a very large investment into your career. You may be taking on some debt, and then be faced with re-entering the workforce after your studies are done. A GovLoop member stated, "I have both a Masters and credentials for my profession. Since I work for the government, these are not as valued as they are in the private sector. Many of my supervisors only have an undergraduate degree and no credentials. There is not a necessary correlation between degrees/credentials and grade. However, I don't regret earning both. They instill confidence and serve as a source of pride and competence, whether that is valued by my organization or not."

GovLoop member Paul Binkley also believes that the decision to go back to graduate school depends on your value drivers. "Your personal values must drive the decisions you make. They are like your personal mission statement. This means we need to be aware of our top one or two values at any given moment."

Figuring this out is not always the easiest process, and your priorities may be changing, Paul states: "Your top values might be family and professional development. In that case, you might search for positions with flexible environments, offer tuition support and/or other professional credentialing, and that could be anywhere in the U.S. or the world."

Dorothy Ramienski Amatucci also commented on GovLoop on what drove her decision to go back to graduate school: "I went back part-time so I could also get internships in fields other than what I ma-

jored in as an undergrad. I worked for about six years in between getting my undergrad and going back for a Master's, during which time I also got certifications at the community college up the street. The most important thing, I think, is research. If you don't know WHY you are going back to school, you probably shouldn't spend thousands of dollars. In this day and age, I think diverse job experience can be just as valuable as an advanced degree in some fields."

There are many factors that contribute to your decision if you should decide to go back to school or not. As the GovLoop community has shown, the decision should not be made lightly and there are numerous factors that you should consider.

# BEST OF GOVLOOP CAREER BLOG POSTS

## KATHY'S TIPS FOR IDENTIFYING A MENTOR

By Kathy Wentworth Drahosz, President, The Training Connection

### Set Developmental Goals

Before identifying a mentor, it is important that you clearly understand your developmental goals. Where are you going five years from today? What are your career aspirations? What are you interested in learning to help you get there?

### Describe Your Ideal Mentor

Mentors come in all shapes and sizes and can be distinguished by how formal (or informal) the relationship is and the experience that can be gained from it. Think for a moment...how would you describe your ideal mentor? What capabilities would they possess? Are you looking for someone with your same functional background or would you like someone to help you bridge into a new career field? Are you interested in a mentor who has a certain niche or someone who brings a broad background rich with organizational experience? Are you interested in someone who has a similar behavioral style or would you prefer someone who brings a contrasting style?

### Create a List of Potential Mentors

Once you have clarified your goals and have identified the characteristics of your ideal mentor, it is time to create a list of potential candidates. It is important to look for people who possess the traits and skills you wish to develop. For example, if you are looking for technical expertise, look for technical experts as potential mentors. However, if you are looking for political skills, think about the people in an organization who seem to be very politically savvy. Also, be willing to select people outside your technical field. One of the best ways to increase your learning is to choose someone who comes from a different background or perspective than your own.

### Select 5 Potential Mentors From Your List

Research the mentors' background. Consider getting advice from an outside source (e.g., people in your professional network). Collect information from articles the mentor may have written or explore their contributions to highly visible projects.

### Arrange Meetings with Your Top 5 Choices

Arrange a face-to-face or telephone meeting to explore the possibility of establishing a mentoring partnership. Gain as much information as you can about the mentor's accomplishments and character. During the meeting, ask to hear the mentor's story—how he or she got where they are and what "factors" made a difference (e.g., skills, challenging projects, or being at the right place at the right time). Be willing to share your background, accomplishments and areas needing improvement.

## QUESTIONS TO ASK DURING INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

By Heather Krasna, Director of Career Services, Evans School of Public Affairs

I always harp on job seekers to do informational interviews. These meetings are essential in building up your personal network and expanding on your knowledge of organizations in your chosen field. But what are you supposed to talk about during your half hour to an hour chat with a professional in your field?

First, it's important to understand the etiquette of such meetings. It is considered untoward and rude to think of an informational interview as a way of getting a job—even if that is your goal, you should not come right out and ask the contact person for a job. They'll figure out soon enough that you are seeking new opportunities and if you have a good rapport and enough reason for them to talk to you (i.e. a friend of theirs referred you or you have an association or alumni network in common, for instance; or even just that you strike them as a nice person), then they will want to help you without your actually asking. Setting the tone as being an information-seeker and hopefully helpful new contact for them is the best way to start.

Once you are in a meeting with someone, it is your job to keep the conversation flowing. Having done your homework on the organization, you can then have a list of questions to ask. Here are some potential ones to consider asking (remembering you won't get to them all in the allotted time—and you must respect their time, which they are donating to you):

### About Their Career History and Current Job

- How did you get started in this field?
- What inspired you to get into this career?
- How did you get your current job?
- What is the hiring process like for jobs like

yours?

- What are some of the typical jobs within your organization?
  - What is your favorite thing about your job?
- What is your biggest challenge?
- What is a typical day like for you?

### About This Career Path

- How would someone like me find out about opportunities in this career field?
- What skills, credentials, education, or experience are needed to enter this field? What skills are most in demand?
- What are some trends impacting the field?
- What are some of the other leading organizations in the field?
- What professional associations are most important to join?
- What are the typical salary ranges for people who are entering this field with my level of experience and education?

### About Their Organization

- What is the culture of the organization like?
- What do you like best about working for this organization? What is the biggest challenge?
- What is the structure of the organization?
- Who do you work with the most often?
- What are some of your partner organizations?

### And to Close

- Can you recommend anyone else for me to contact? Would you be willing to introduce me?
  - Do you have any other advice for me?
  - How could I be helpful to you going forward?
- Be sure to follow up with a thank-you card (an email is a bare minimum). Hopefully, you will have established a good contact who will be willing to be an internal referral for you, give you job search tips, provide job leads, and introduce you to new people—all of which will help you land your perfect job.

## 10 COMMON PITFALLS IN YOUR FEDERAL RESUME WORK EXPERIENCE SECTION

**GovLoop Blog Post by Kathryn Troutman, CEO, Founder, The Resume Place, Inc. and Federal Career Training Institute**

Do you want to avoid the most common pitfalls that I have seen in the Work Experience section of the federal resume?

Whether you are just sitting down to draft your federal resume, or if you already have what you consider a polished draft, here is an important list of often-found problems, and what to do about them if your resume is suffering from these ailments.

First a note: remember that your resume will actually be read in USAJOBS, not scanned. Considering that the Federal human resources (HR) specialist will receive 100 to 400 (or more) resumes per application, and that the USAJOBS resumes are READ / SCANNED by HUMANS (not an automated system, scanning for keywords), the resumes should be succinct and powerful.

The HR specialists are learning now to READ a federal resume, so that they can find the specialized experience, examples, accomplishments, and experience they require to determine if you are Minimally Qualified, Qualified or Best Qualified, which is the new Category Rating system for applications. A Best Qualified score is 90 to 100; Qualified is 80 to 89; and Minimally Qualified is 70 to 79. Under 70, you do not get considered.

### **Problem #1: Too Many Jobs**

The Official Federal Resume Writing Rules in the OF-510 from the Office of Personnel Management states that you should include Recent and Relevant positions. So, if you have more than 10 positions in your entire Work Experience section, review the positions to determine which positions are the most recent and relevant. The best number of positions in the Work Experience section is 4 to 7 at most. LEAVE OUT: short jobs, non-relevant jobs, repetitive jobs, non-paid jobs (move them to Additional information, or leave out), interim jobs.

### **Problem #2: Including your entire life history**

The SF-171 (prior to 1996) was a life history. Every job, every address for every employer, every supervisor change, every salary change, every period of unemployment was a "job block" in the SF-171. The SF-171 was broken down by letters: A,B,C,D. Many SF-171s would go up to letter R or S. The SF-171s were 30 to 50 pages. That seems amazing, right? The Federal Resume average length is 4 or 5 pages!

### **Problem #3: Going back too far**

If you are over 50 and you held professional positions in the 1970s and 1980s, LEAVE THEM OFF. The human resources specialists are interested in the only the last 10 years of your work experience (back to 2000). If you want to give some background, you can write about your experiences back to 1990. But there should be NO DATES before 1990. This will help with age discrimination and sheer resume length.

### **Problem #4: Gaps in dates**

The federal human resources specialists DO NOT CARE if there are gaps in dates if they are short (1 year or less). If you have positions in your list of jobs that are not recent or relevant, then you should LEAVE THEM OUT. The HR specialists are looking for experience that supports your candidacy for their job. They want to see specialized experience in their field of work.

### **Problem #5: Too many temporary or contractor assignments**

If you are a temp or government contractor and you have 15 assignments with one contracting firm, write them under the name of the contracting firm as ONE JOB, not 15 JOBS. Within the Contractor "job block" add highlights of your contracts that were more impressive, challenging, and results-oriented than others. Feature the contracts that resulted in new or impressive projects.

### **Problem #6: Too many short, irrelevant jobs**

Again the positions should be recent and relevant. If you have one six-month position that is a repeat of another, is not relevant and clutters up the solid work experiences. Simply take it out.

### **Problem #7: Few or no accomplishments**

Most resumes that we receive do not include accomplishments. If you want to prove that you have a certain Knowledge, Skill, or Ability, you will need to add an achievement that proves you have the experience. The proof is in the pudding.

### **Problem #8: Accomplishments with no context, challenge, or results**

If you do include a one-line accomplishment, it may or may not help the HR specialist to see what obstacles you overcame, how the accomplishment helped to meet the organization's mission, how you solved the problem, or why it was an important accomplishment. For the federal resume, the accomplishment needs more details to engage the HR specialist and the supervisor.

### **Problem #9: Super career change**

If you are currently in Corporate America and are seeking a job with Customs & Border Patrol as a Mission Support Specialist (for example), the resume must change about 100%. This is an extreme career change resulting in a very difficult resume to craft. I recommend my book Ten Steps to a Federal Job, or professional help with this translational writing of skills, keywords, mission, language and the WORKS.

### **Problem #10: Keywords are missing**

Most first-time federal applicants simply do not include keywords from a target announcement. If you see the word SUPPLY in the announcement 20 times, that means that this word MUST go in your resume within the top 5 lines of your Work Experience section. The HR specialist is looking for a Supply person, and if you don't have that word in your resume ANYWHERE, you will probably not be Best Qualified, Referred, or even Minimally Qualified.

### **In closing...**

Your Writing Strategy for Work Experience in Your Federal Resume: The Federal Resume is NOT the same as a Private Industry Resume.

It is longer (although, no longer than 5 pages), more detailed, must include keywords from a federal job announcement, and must demonstrate your specialized experience. This resume is equal to a proposal for work for the government. It is a technical document that should carefully match a job announcement with serious consideration about your ability to perform the job. If you spend time and look at samples of federal resumes vs. private industry resumes, you could get Best Qualified and referred to a supervisor for consideration of an Interview; and may be hired into the Best Job in America with the US Federal Government.

## NEGOTIATING IN A DOWN ECONOMY

**GovLoop Post by Heather Krasna, Director, Career Services, Evans School of Public Affairs**

“More?? You want more??!” is the cry we remember from Oliver Twist’s warden when poor Oliver asks for more gruel at the orphanage. Well, this is actually not the common response from employers when candidates have negotiated their salary, even in this economy.

I have coached several job seekers in the last month to successfully increase the salary of job offers. Two come to mind in particular, both in local government jobs which officially had hiring freezes. In one of these two cases, the candidate was offered a position at a level 2 grade and wanted to make the case that he was worthy of a level 3 grade because of his master’s degree. I actually called one of my contacts at the human resources department and asked how salary grades related to education and other credentials, and was told that the grades don’t necessarily correlate with anything except the length of time an employee is in the job (in this particular city government). The HR representative actually said “I seriously doubt whether he would get any more than what is offered, because we are laying people off and have a hiring freeze.”

I conveyed all this to the candidate, but added that since he had already been offered the job and the department members were all very enthusiastic about him, he really had nothing to lose by just asking for a higher salary. We worked on a pitch in which the candidate emphasized how excited he was about the offer and how well he

fit (and even exceeded) the requirements of the job. He made a strong case that his education and experience would allow him to bring the position to an even higher level than was asked for, and in the end he was successfully granted the level 3 grade of pay, which was significantly higher than the offered level.

My general advice about salary negotiation in this economy is that candidates should be especially respectful and careful about how they go about negotiating, and they might even start the conversation with a statement like “I’d like to make sure that I wouldn’t jeopardize my offer with you by just asking about salary.” After getting reassurance that asking the question wouldn’t lose them the offer, the candidates can then go about negotiating the same way as usual, emphasizing how they exceed the requirements of the job, and/or how the average salary in the field might be more than what is offered (after doing research on salaries). If an employer doesn’t have the budget to give more than the offered salary, they can say so, and you still haven’t lost anything. They can even laugh at you! But it doesn’t matter as long as you’ve at least tried.

The part that is the hardest in this economy isn’t the negotiating of salary, but the landing of an offer in the first place. That part is starting to look up a little bit, too. More candidates are getting interviews now than they were at this time last year. It still is taking months longer for candidates to land jobs than it did in the better years in recent memory like 2006-7, but there are some glimmers of hope on the horizon.

Heather Krasna is the author of Jobs That Matter.

## WHAT ARE YOUR FAVORITE SES ECQS?

**Blog Post by Kathryn Troutman, CEO, Founder, The Resume Place, Inc. and Federal Career Training Institute**

If you are going to consider an SES position within the next 5 years, you should begin to think about the ECQS and your experience. What’s your favorite or best ECQ?

Consider these basic tips for thinking about your leadership qualifications and preparing to write the five ECQs.

**ECQ #1 – Leading Change:** This competency is about leading change, not just implementing it. It looks for creativity and strategic thinking. “Ask yourself, ‘When did I lead change? Why was change needed? What was my role in the change?’” we recommend. “This is not about what your department did, but what you did to lead change.”

**ECQ #2 – Leading People:** The second ECQ centers on the ability to lead people toward meeting the organization’s vision. “Your example might address conflict management, leveraging diversity, or implementing career development,” the authors say. “Ask yourself, ‘Who did I lead? What was going on with them? What were the challenges of their jobs?’”

**ECQ #3 – Results Driven:** “This is a Type A competency.” “The third ECQ relates to action, staying on task, following up, and being driven by the desired results. Top leaders are very results driven, like Giuliani was as New York’s mayor.”

**ECQ #4 – Business Acumen:** To tackle this qualification, you need three “heads” – oriented to finance, human capital and technology. “This can be the toughest ECQ,” the authors note. “Government people tend to think about programs and policies, rather than business. But think of contracts, procurements and budgets for finance, restructuring, recruitment and training for people, and security, IT security and automation for technology.”

**ECQ #5 – Building Coalitions:** The fifth ECQ is about partnering, political savvy, influencing and negotiating. The authors prompt with this question, “Ask yourself, ‘How well do I partner with other organizations to achieve goals? How well do I communicate with them? How well do I work with others?’” Lack of partnering was behind the failure to respond quickly to the Katrina disaster, the SES consultants noted. Now emergency management has tremendous partnerships between different government levels.

Which ECQ/s are your favorite? I like Change and Results and Building Coalitions. But owning a business means that I have to be good in all of them.

Written by Kathryn Troutman, Co-Author and Publisher, The New SES Application and Program Director of Mastering the SES Application Workshop.

More ECQ: <http://www.opm.gov/ses/recruitment/ecq.asp>

### 1. Leading Change

## GOVLOOP ONLINE RESOURCES

1. 9 Interviewing Mistakes Security Cleared Job Seekers Should Avoid
2. The Doer's Theorem
3. Advice from a Retired Public Servant
4. Top 5 Tips to Prepare for Interviews in the 21st Century
5. How Do I Hit the Bulls Eye When There is no Target?
6. Talent vs. Potential Where Do I Stand
7. Getting Your Next Government Job
8. The Worst and Best Degrees, A Bunch of Bunk
9. Is Grad School Worth it or is Credentialing the Answer?
10. How to Write a Federal Resume
11. Networking Events: Battle Zone or Tea Party?
12. Top 4 Ways to Organize Your Job Search
13. Need a Job? Three Steps to Take Now
14. Making More than Money
15. Difficult Interview Questions

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Pat Fiorenza is currently a Research Analyst at GovLoop. Through the creation of blogs, research reports, guides, in-person and online events, Pat helps to identify and find best practices to share with the GovLoop community. Pat received his Masters of Public Administration degree from the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University.

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