



# CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction to Government Employment

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Federal employment increased dramatically over the past two years compared to the private sector, where unemployment hovers in the high single digits. From October 2009 through June 2010, agencies hired 212,188 new hires. Total employment, including the Postal Service, was 2,850,280 as of September 2010.<sup>1</sup>

Many retirements are projected as each day 10,000 baby boomers turn age 65 for the next 19 years! Hiring will be driven by retirements and the need to staff over 100 new agencies and regulatory organizations due to the healthcare and banking legislation passed in 2010.





There are many reasons to consider federal employment. The average annual federal worker's compensation, pay plus benefits, is **\$123,049** compared to just **\$61,051** for the private sector.<sup>2</sup> Average salary is **\$81,258** and new hires can receive student loan payoff assistance, relocation and cash incentives for hard-to-fill positions, and the benefits package is exceptional. A larger percentage of professionals and fewer service and clerical positions contribute to higher average salaries.

Objectives are listed for key elements included in each chapter. The image to the right is used throughout this book to highlight points of interest.

*The average  
annual salary  
now exceeds  
\$81,186.*



### CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

-  Understanding the opportunities
-  Determining the nature of federal employment, working conditions, occupations, training, outlook, pay and benefits
-  What benefits to expect including retirement
-  How to develop your career and get promoted

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<sup>1</sup> Central Personnel Data File 9/2010 and the 2010 Comprehensive Statement of Postal Operations

<sup>2</sup> Bureau of Economic Analysis, National Income & Product Account Tables 6.2D and 6.5D, 2010.

It is difficult to imagine just how large the federal job market is until you compare it to its closest private-sector rival. Wal-Mart is the largest company worldwide, with annual sales of \$530 billion and 2.1 million workers. Uncle Sam employs 750,000 more workers than Wal-Mart. Over the past two years alone over 200,000 new workers were hired to fill critical vacancies nationwide. The average annual salary for all pay plans increased from \$67,186 in 2005 to \$81,258 in 2010. The U.S. government is the largest employer in the United States, hiring approximately 2 percent of the nation's civilian workforce.

Job hunters will find helpful information and resources in this book to research employment options, locate job vacancies, understand the federal job market, and apply for federal jobs. Numerous programs, options, and resources are reviewed and explained in detail, including:

- ✓ How to approach the federal sector and identify available recruitment incentives including the student loan repayment and relocation payments that are offered for hard-to-fill vacancies.
- ✓ The latest federal hiring reform and federal-style résumé guidance from Barbara Adams, President and CEO of CareerPro Global, Inc. CPG combines several decades of industry-writing experience from entry-level to Senior Executive Service (SES), within or aspiring to work within the federal government.
- ✓ How to evaluate job announcements, answer occupational questionnaires, obtain a "Best Qualified" rating, and write Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSAs) statements that are still used in various forms for some positions.
- ✓ Most non-Postal Service federal jobs, over 80 percent, don't require written exams. Determine whether your occupation requires a written entrance exam and if one is required how to prepare for it.
- ✓ Over a thousand resources are listed, including interactive employment Web sites, an agency directory, occupation lists, skills index, and contact numbers for personnel specialists.
- ✓ You will learn about student employment programs, veterans preference, hiring opportunities for the disabled, law enforcement and overseas job opportunities, Post Office jobs, and much more.
- ✓ Prepare for interviews, learn about the generous pay and benefits, networking techniques, and how to locate and apply for jobs stateside and overseas.

*You need to know how to take  
advantage of the federal hiring system  
and recent changes to successfully land  
the job you want in government.*

Excellent job opportunities are available for those who know how to tap this lucrative job market. All government hiring is based on performance and qualifications regardless of your gender, race, color, creed, religion, disability, or national origin. Where else can you apply for a high-paying entry-level job that offers employment at thousands of locations internationally, excellent career advancement opportunities, and careers in hundreds of occupations?

Government hired over a million part time workers in 2010 for the US. Census alone and continues to hire hundreds of thousands of full time workers each year. Other vacancies exist in the legislative and judicial branches. Numerous job opportunities are available for those willing to seek them out.

Many opportunities will be created as over 637,000 federal employees will become eligible for retirement in 2011 according to *OPM's Analysis of Federal Employee Retirement Data Report*, Table 2.

The following statistical analysis will help you focus on just where the greatest opportunities are. The largest agencies are featured and their employment trends analyzed. Large agencies hire a broad spectrum of workers in hundreds of occupations. It's best to expand your search to as many agencies as possible to improve your chances.

Six agencies, including the Postal Service, employ approximately 75 percent of the workforce, or 2,137,710 employees. Of the 89,204 overseas jobs 62,838 were U.S. citizens. The remaining overseas employees are foreign nationals. The changes from September of 2006 to September 2010 in Table 1-1 show that all agencies except the Postal Service increased employment, some substantially. The Department of Defense increased by 76,555 employees. Overall, the total employment increased by 7 percent while the Judicial branch essentially stayed the same and the Legislative branch employment increased by 4 percent. The second largest increase was in Veterans Affairs; their employment increased 27 percent, an increase of 65,569 workers.

**TABLE 1-1**  
The Six Largest Federal Departments

<b>Total Workforce</b>	<b>2,850, 280</b>	<b>100 %</b>
Legislative branch	30,859	1.10 %
Judicial branch	33,754	1.20 %
USPS & PRC *	671,687	23.60 %
Executive (non-postal)	2,113,980	74.10 %
<b>①</b> Defense	764,299	
<b>②</b> Veterans Affairs	308,814	
<b>③</b> Homeland Security	188,983	
<b>④</b> Justice	109,900	
<b>⑤</b> Treasury	116,901	

Reference: Federal Civilian Workforce Statistics – September 2010

\* The United States Postal Service (USPS) and the Postal Rate Commission (PRC).

## NATURE OF FEDERAL EMPLOYMENT

The federal government's essential duties include defending the United States from foreign aggression and terrorism, representing U.S. interests abroad, enforcing laws and regulations, and administering domestic programs and agencies.<sup>3</sup> U.S. citizens are particularly aware of the federal government when they pay their income taxes each year, but they usually do not consider the government's role when they watch a weather forecast, purchase fresh and uncontaminated groceries, travel by highway or air, or make a deposit at their bank. Workers employed by the federal government play a vital role in these and many other aspects of our daily lives.

This book describes federal government civilian career opportunities, including jobs with the Postal Service (an independent agency of the federal government). Armed forces career opportunities are described in the current edition of the Occupational Outlook Handbook.

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<sup>3</sup> The 2010-2011 Career Guide to Industries, U.S. Department of Labor

Over 200 years ago, the founders of the United States gathered in Philadelphia to create a Constitution for a new national government and lay the foundation for self-governance. The Constitution of the United States, ratified by the last of the 13 original states in 1791, created the three branches of the federal government and granted certain powers and responsibilities to each. The legislative, judicial, and executive branches were created with equal powers but very different responsibilities that act to keep their powers in balance.

The legislative branch is responsible for forming and amending the legal structure of the nation. Its largest component is Congress, the primary U.S. legislative body, which is made up of the Senate and the House of Representatives. This body includes senators, representatives, their staffs, and various support workers. The legislative branch employs only about 2 percent of federal workers, nearly all of whom work in the Washington, D.C. area.

The judicial branch is responsible for interpreting the laws that the legislative branch enacts. The Supreme Court, the nation's definitive judicial body, makes the highest rulings. Its decisions usually follow the appeal of a decision made by the one of the regional Courts of Appeal, which hear cases appealed from U.S. District Courts, the Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit, or state Supreme Courts. U.S. District Courts are located in each state and are the first to hear most cases under federal jurisdiction. The judicial branch employs about the same number of people as does the legislative branch, but its offices and employees are dispersed throughout the country.

Of the three branches, the executive branch — through the power vested by the Constitution in the office of the president — has the widest range of responsibilities. Consequently, it employed 97 percent of all federal civilian employees (excluding Postal Service workers) in 2010. The executive branch is composed of the Executive Office of the President, 15 executive Cabinet departments, including the recently created Department of Homeland Security, and nearly 90 independent agencies, each of which has clearly defined duties. The Executive Office of the President is composed of several offices and councils that aid the president in policy decisions. These include the Office of Management and Budget, which oversees the administration of the federal budget; the National Security Council, which advises the president on matters of national defense; and the Council of Economic Advisers, which makes economic policy recommendations.

Each of the 15 executive Cabinet departments administers programs that oversee an aspect of life in the United States. The highest departmental official of each Cabinet department, the secretary, is a member of the president's Cabinet. The 15 departments, listed by employment size, are listed below with a brief description and total employment.

## 6 The Book of U.S. Government Jobs

*Defense:* (664,299) Manages the military forces that protect our country and its interests, including the Departments of the Army, Navy, and Air Force and a number of smaller agencies. The civilian workforce employed by the Department of Defense performs various support activities, such as payroll and public relations.

*Veterans Affairs:* (308,814) Administers programs to aid U.S. veterans and their families; runs the veterans hospital system, and operates our national cemeteries.

*Homeland Security:* (188,983) Works to prevent terrorist attacks within the United States; reduce vulnerability to terrorism; and minimize the damage from potential attacks and natural disasters. Conceived after the September 11, 2001 attacks and officially established in early 2003. There are four major directorates.

*Treasury:* (109,900) Regulates banks and other financial institutions, administers the public debt, prints currency, and collects federal income taxes.

*Justice:* (116,901) Enforces federal laws, prosecutes cases in federal courts, and runs federal prisons.

*Agriculture:* (108,291) Promotes U.S. agriculture domestically and internationally, manages forests, researches new ways to grow crops and conserve natural resources, ensures safe meat and poultry products, and leads the Federal anti-hunger programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly known as the Food Stamp program) and the National School Lunch Program.

*Interior:* (79,048) Manages Federal lands, including the national parks, runs hydroelectric power systems, and promotes conservation of natural resources.

*Health and Human Services:* (83,202) Sponsors medical research; approves use of new drugs and medical devices; runs the Public Health Service; and administers Medicare.

*Transportation:* (57,947) Sets national transportation policy; plans and funds the construction of highways and mass transit systems; and regulates railroad, aviation, and maritime operations.

*Commerce:* (49,162) Forecasts the weather; charts the oceans; regulates patents and trademarks; conducts the Census; compiles statistics; and promotes U.S. economic growth by encouraging international trade.

*State:* (11,890) Oversees the nation's embassies and consulates; issues passports; monitors U.S. interests abroad; and represents the United States before international organizations.

*Labor:* (16,640) Enforces laws guaranteeing fair pay, workplace safety, and equal job opportunity; administers unemployment insurance; regulates pension funds; and collects and analyzes economic data through its Bureau of Labor Statistics.

*Energy:* (16,625) Coordinates the national use and provision of energy; oversees the production and disposal of nuclear weapons; and plans for future energy needs.

*Housing and Urban Development:* (10,041) Funds public housing projects; enforces equal housing laws; and insures and finances mortgages.

*Education:* (4,536) Provides scholarships, student loans, and aid to schools.

There are numerous independent agencies that perform tasks which fall between the jurisdictions of the executive departments, or that are more efficiently executed by an autonomous agency. Some smaller but well-known independent agencies include the Peace Corps, the Securities and Exchange Commission, and the Federal Communications Commission. Although the majority of these agencies are fairly small, employing fewer than 1,000 workers (many employ fewer than 100 workers), some are quite large. The largest independent agencies are:

- *Social Security Administration:* Operates various retirement and disability programs and Medicare.
- *National Aeronautics and Space Administration:* Oversees aviation research and conducts exploration and research beyond the Earth's atmosphere.
- *Environmental Protection Agency:* Runs programs to control and reduce pollution of the nation's water, air, and lands.
- *Tennessee Valley Authority:* Operates the hydroelectric power system in the Tennessee River Valley.
- *General Services Administration:* Manages and protects federal government property and records.
- *Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation:* Maintains stability of and public confidence in the nation's financial system, by insuring deposits and promoting sound banking practices.

## **WORKING CONDITIONS**

Due to the wide range of federal jobs, working conditions are equally variable. While most federal employees work in office buildings, hospitals, or laboratories, a large number also can be found at border crossings, airports, shipyards, military bases, construction sites, and national parks. Work environments vary from comfortable and relaxed to hazardous and stressful, such as those experienced by law enforcement officers, astronauts, and air traffic controllers.

The vast majority of federal employees work full time, often on flexible or “flexi-time” schedules that allow workers more control over their work schedules. Some agencies also offer telecommuting or “flexi-place” programs, which allow selected workers to perform some job duties at home or from regional centers.

Some federal workers spend much of their time away from the offices in which they are based. Inspectors or compliance officers, for example, often visit businesses and work sites to ensure that laws and regulations are obeyed. Some federal workers frequently travel long distances, spending days or weeks away from home. Auditors, for example, may spend weeks at a time in distant locations.

## **EMPLOYMENT**

The federal government, including the U.S. Postal Service, employs about 2.7 million civilian workers, or about 2 percent of the nation’s workforce. The federal government is the nation’s single largest employer. Because data on employment in certain agencies cannot be released to the public for national security reasons, this total does not include employment for the Central Intelligence Agency, National Security Agency, Defense Intelligence Agency, and National Imagery and Mapping Agency.

The federal government makes an effort to have a workforce as diverse as the nation’s civilian labor force. The federal government serves as a model for all employers in abiding by equal employment opportunity legislation, which protects current and potential employees from discrimination based on race, color, religion, gender, national origin, disability, or age. The federal government also makes an effort to recruit and accommodate persons with disabilities.

Even though most federal departments and agencies are based in the Washington, D.C., area, fewer than 15 percent of federal employees worked in the vicinity of the nation’s capital in 2010. In addition to federal employees working throughout the United States, about 3 percent are assigned overseas, mostly in embassies or defense installations.



## OCCUPATIONS

Although the federal government employs workers in every major occupational group, workers are not employed in the same proportions in which they are employed throughout the economy as a whole (Table 1-2). The analytical and technical nature of many government duties translates into a much higher proportion of professional, management, business, and financial occupations in the federal government, compared with most industries. Conversely, the government sells very little, so it employs relatively few sales workers. A complete occupations list is included in Appendix C and a Skills to Hiring Agency listing is available in Appendix D.

**Table 1-2**

Percent distribution of employment in the federal government  
and the private sector by major occupational group

<b>Occupational Group</b>	<b>Federal Government</b>	<b>Private Sector</b>
<i><b>Total</b></i>	<i><b>100</b></i>	<i><b>100</b></i>
Professional and related	33.2	20.9
Management, business, and financial	33.7	9.2
Office and administrative support	13.2	17.0
Service	8.2	19.7
Installation, maintenance, and repair	4.6	3.9
Transportation and materiel moving	2.9	6.7
Production	1.5	7.0
Construction and extraction	1.6	4.6
Sales and related	0.4	10.2
Farming, fishing and forestry	0.4	0.7

Source: BLS National Employment Matrix 2008-18

Professional and related occupations accounted for about one third of federal employment in 2010. The largest group of professional workers worked in life, physical, and social science occupations, such as biological scientists, conservation scientists and foresters, environmental scientists and geoscientists, and forest and conservation technicians. They do work such as determining the effects of drugs on living organisms, preventing fires in the national forests, and predicting earthquakes and hurricanes. The Department of Agriculture employed the vast majority of life scientists, but physical scientists were distributed throughout a variety of departments and agencies.

Many health professionals, such as licensed practical and licensed vocational nurses, registered nurses, and physicians and surgeons, were employed by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in VA hospitals.

Large numbers of federal workers also held jobs as engineers, including aerospace, civil, computer hardware, electrical and electronics, industrial, mechanical, and nuclear engineers. Engineers were found in many departments of the executive branch, but they most commonly worked in the Department of Defense, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and the Department of Transportation. In general, they solve problems and provide advice on technical programs, such as building highway bridges or implementing agency-wide computer systems.

Computer specialists — primarily computer software engineers, network and computer systems analysts, and computer systems administrators — are employed throughout the federal government. They write computer programs, analyze problems related to data processing, and keep computer systems running smoothly. Many health professionals, such as registered nurses, physicians and surgeons, and licensed practical nurses are employed by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in one of many VA hospitals.

Management, business, and financial workers made up about 34 percent of federal employment and were primarily responsible for overseeing operations. Managerial workers include a broad range of officials who, at the highest levels, may head federal agencies or programs. Middle managers, on the other hand, usually oversee one activity or aspect of a program. One management occupation — legislators — are responsible for passing and amending laws and overseeing the executive branch of the government. Within the federal government, legislators are entirely found in Congress.

Others occupations in this category are accountants and auditors, who prepare and analyze financial reports, review and record revenues and expenditures, and investigate operations for fraud and inefficiency. Purchasing agents handle federal purchases of supplies. Management analysts study government operations and systems and suggest improvements. These employees aid management staff with administrative duties. Administrative support workers in the federal government include secretaries and general office clerks. Purchasing agents handle federal purchases of supplies, and tax examiners, collectors, and revenue agents determine and collect taxes.

*Management, business, and financial workers made up about 34 percent of federal employment.*

Compared with the economy as a whole, workers in service occupations were relatively scarce in the federal government. About seven out of 10 federal workers in service occupations were protective service workers, such as detectives and criminal investigators, police and sheriff's patrol officers, and correctional officers and jailers. These workers protect the public from crime and oversee federal prisons.

Federally employed workers in installation, maintenance, and repair occupations include aircraft mechanics and service technicians who fix and maintain all types of aircraft. Also included are electrical and electronic equipment mechanics, installers, and repairers, who inspect, adjust, and repair electronic equipment such as industrial controls, transmitters, antennas, radar, radio, and navigation systems.

The federal government employed a relatively small number of workers in transportation; production; construction; sales and related; and farming, fishing, and forestry occupations. However, they employ almost all air traffic controllers in the country and a significant number of agricultural inspectors and bridge and lock tenders.

## TRAINING AND ADVANCEMENT

In all but a few cases, applicants for federal jobs must be U.S. citizens. Applicants who are veterans of military service may also be able to claim veterans' preference status over other candidates with equal qualifications. For an increasing number of jobs requiring access to sensitive or classified materials, applicants must undergo a background investigation in order to obtain a security clearance. This investigation covers an individual's criminal, credit, and employment history, as well as other records. The scope of the investigation will vary, depending on the nature of the position in the government and the degree of harm that an individual in that position could cause.

The educational and training requirements for jobs in the federal government mirror those in the private sector for most major occupational groups. Many jobs in professional and related occupations, for example, require a four-year college degree. Some, such as engineers, physicians and surgeons, and biological and physical scientists, require a bachelor's or higher degree in a specific field of study. Because managers usually are promoted from professional occupations, most have at least a bachelor's degree. However, registered nurses and many technician occupations may be entered with two years of training after high school. Office and administrative support workers in the government usually need only a high school diploma, although any further training or experience, such as a junior college degree or a couple of years of relevant work experience, is an asset. Most federal jobs in other occupations require no more than a high school degree, although most departments and agencies prefer workers with vocational training or previous experience.

Once the person is employed, each federal department or agency determines its own training requirements and offers workers opportunities to improve job skills to advance to other jobs. These may include technical or skills training, tuition assistance or reimbursement, fellowship programs, and executive leadership and

*In all but a few cases, applicants for federal jobs must be U.S. citizens.*

management training programs, seminars, and workshops. This training may be offered on the job, by another agency, or at local colleges and universities.

Advancement for most workers in the federal government is currently based on a system of occupational pay levels, or “grades,” although more departments and agencies are being granted waivers to experiment with different pay and promotion strategies. Workers typically enter the federal service at the starting grade for an occupation and may be promoted throughout their careers while others begin a “career ladder” of promotions until they reach the full-performance grade for that occupation. This system provides for a limited number of noncompetitive promotions, which usually are awarded at regular intervals, assuming job performance is satisfactory. The exact pay grades associated with a job’s career track depend upon the occupation.

Typically, workers without a high school diploma who are hired as clerks start at grade 1 unless they have 6 months of general experience to qualify for a GS-03. High school graduates with no additional training hired at the same job start at grade 2 or 3. Entrants with some technical training or experience who are hired as technicians may start at grade 4. Those with a bachelor’s degree generally are hired in professional occupations, such as economist, with a career ladder that starts at grade 5 or 7, depending on academic achievement. Entrants with a master’s degree or Ph.D. may start at grade 9. Individuals with professional degrees may be hired at the grade 11 or 12 level. Those with a combination of education and substantive experience may be hired at higher grades than those with education alone.

New employees usually start at the first step of a grade (defined on page 16); however, if the position in question is difficult to fill, entrants may receive somewhat higher pay or special rates. Physicians and engineer positions are paid on a special pay table.

Federal workers usually receive periodic step increases within their grade if they are performing their job satisfactorily. They must compete for subsequent promotions, and advancement becomes more difficult. At this point, promotions occur as vacancies arise, and they are based solely on merit. In addition to within-grade longevity increases, federal workers are awarded bonuses for excellent job performance.

Workers who advance to managerial or supervisory positions may receive within-grade longevity increases, bonuses, and promotions to higher grades. The top managers in the federal civil service belong to the Senior Executive Service (SES), the highest positions that federal workers can reach without being specifically nominated by the president and confirmed by the U.S. Senate. Relatively few workers attain SES positions, and competition is intense. Bonus provisions for SES positions are even more performance-based than are those for lower-level positions. Because it is the headquarters for most federal agencies, the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area offers the best opportunities to advance to upper-level managerial and supervisory jobs.

## OUTLOOK

Wage and salary employment in the federal government is projected to increase by 10 percent over the 2008-18 period. There will be a substantial number of job openings as many federal workers are expected to retire over the next decade, although job prospects are expected to vary by occupation.

Wage and salary employment in the federal government, except Post Office, is expected to increase by 10 percent over the coming decade, which is close to the 11 percent growth rate for all industries combined. Staffing levels in federal government can be subject to change in the long run because of changes in public policies as legislated by the Congress, which affect spending levels and hiring decisions for the various departments and agencies. In general, over the coming decade, domestic programs are likely to see an increase in employment.

While there will be growth in many occupations over the coming decade, demand will be especially strong for specialized workers in areas related to public health, information security, scientific research, law enforcement, and financial services. As a larger share of the U.S. population enters the older age brackets, demand for healthcare will increase. This will lead to a substantial number of new jobs in federal hospitals and other healthcare facilities for registered nurses and physicians and surgeons. In addition, as cyber security becomes an increasingly important aspect of national defense, rapid growth will occur among information technology specialists, such as computer and information research scientists, who will be needed to devise defense methods, monitor computer networks, and execute security protocol. Furthermore, as global activity in scientific development increases, the federal Government will add many physical science, life science, and engineering workers to remain competitive. Aside from these specific areas, numerous new jobs in other occupational areas will arise as the diverse federal workforce continues to expand.

As financial and business transactions face increased scrutiny, a substantial number of compliance officers and claims adjusters, examiners, and investigators will be added to federal payrolls. In addition, as the population grows and national security remains a priority, many new law enforcement officers, such as detectives and criminal investigators will be needed.

Job prospects in the federal government are expected to vary by occupation. Over the next decade, a significant number of workers are expected to retire, which will create a large number of job openings. This may create favorable prospects in certain occupations, but jobseekers may face competition for positions in occupations with fewer retirements, or for popular jobs that attract many applicants.

Competition for federal positions can increase during times of economic uncertainty, when workers seek the stability of federal employment. In general, employment in the federal government is considered to be relatively stable because it is less susceptible than private industries to fluctuations in the economy.

## GETTING STARTED

*The Book of U.S. Government Jobs* walks you through the federal hiring process. This book steers readers to highly informative government and private sector internet web sites, self-service job information centers, and telephone job hotlines, and it explores all facets of the federal job market.

Readers will find up-to-date information on how the federal employment system works from an insider's perspective, how to locate job announcements through various methods, and guidance on how to complete a federal application package that will get the attention of rating officials. You'll learn about special hiring programs for the physically challenged, veterans, and students. Thousands of job opportunities, Civil Service Exam requirements, overseas jobs, Postal Service jobs, how to complete your employment application, and much more. The Job Hunter's Checklist in Appendix A offers a comprehensive checklist that will take you through the entire federal employment process. Use Appendix A throughout your job search. Visit <http://federaljobs.net>, this book's companion web site, for book updates, valuable links, résumé and KSA writing services, qualification standards for all occupations, and for links to tens of thousands of job announcements.

The five appendices include an easy-to-use federal job check list, complete lists of federal occupations, comprehensive agency summaries, an agency skills index, and contact lists including employment office addresses and phone numbers.

This book will guide you step-by-step through the federal employment process, from filling out your first employment application to locating job announcements, networking resources, and hiring agencies. Follow the guidelines set forth in this book to dramatically improve your chances of landing a federal job.

## PAY AND BENEFITS

Job security, good pay, and an excellent retirement system are just a few of the top reasons most people seek federal employment. Others consider government careers because of desirable travel opportunities, training availability, diverse occupations, and the ability to locate jobs nationwide and overseas.

In an effort to give agencies more flexibility in how they pay their workers, there are several different pay systems in effect or planning to be implemented over the next few years. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) uses a core compensation pay band system. Their system incorporates fewer, but wider pay bands, instead of grade levels. Pay increases, under these systems, are almost entirely based on performance, as opposed to length of service.

There are eight predominant pay systems. Approximately half of the workforce is under the General Schedule (GS) pay scale, 20 percent are paid under the Postal Service rates, and about 10 percent are paid under the Federal Wage System (FWS). The remaining pay systems are for the Executive Schedule, Foreign Service, Special Salary Rates, and Nonappropriated Fund Instrumentalities pay scales, and Veterans Health Administration.

*A number of agencies like the Federal Aviation Administration implemented core compensation pay band systems as early as 1995.*

It is the case, however, that the majority of professional and administrative federal workers are still paid under the General Schedule (GS). The General Schedule, shown in Table 1-3, has 15 grades of pay for civilian white-collar and service workers, and smaller within-grade step increases that occur based on length of service and quality of performance. New employees usually start at the first step of a grade. In an effort to make federal pay more responsive to local labor market conditions, federal employees working in the U.S. receive locality pay. The specific amount of locality pay is determined by survey comparisons of private sector wage rates and federal wage rates in the relevant geographic area. At its highest level, locality pay can lead to an increase of as much as 26 percent above the base salary. A January pay adjustment tied to changes in private sector pay levels is divided between an across-the-board pay increase in the General Schedule and locality pay increases in most years.

In January 2011 the average wage for full-time workers paid under the General Schedule was \$82,883. For those in craft, repair, operator, and laborer jobs, the Federal Wage System (FWS) is used to pay these workers. This schedule sets federal wages so that they are comparable to prevailing regional wage rates for similar types of jobs. As a result, wage rates paid under the FWS can vary significantly from one locality to another.

In addition to base pay and bonuses, federal employees may receive incentive awards. These one-time awards, ranging from \$25 to \$10,000, are bestowed for a significant suggestion, a special act or service, or sustained high job performance. Some workers also may receive “premium” pay, which is granted when the employee must work overtime, on holidays, on weekends, at night, or under hazardous conditions.

The 2011 “Base Rate” General Schedule (GS) pay chart is presented in this chapter. Updated GS pay tables including all 36 Locality Pay Tables are posted on visit [www.federaljobs.net](http://www.federaljobs.net) — select “Pay Schedules” on the main menu. This site is the companion Web site for *The Book of U.S. Government Jobs* and many of this book’s resources and Web links are listed on this site to assist you with your job search. On September 30, 2010, OPM published an Interim Rule in the Federal Register making Alaska and Hawaii separate whole State locality pay areas and including the other non-foreign areas as defined in 5 CFR 591.205 in the Rest of U.S. locality pay area.

General Schedule (GS) base pay varies from the GS-1 level at \$17,803 per annum to \$129,517 per annum at step 10 of the GS-15 grade, not including locality pay adjustments. The Senior Executive Service salary tops out at \$179,700 per annum. The average annual salary for full-time non-postal employees increased to just over \$82,883 in 2010. Starting pay depends on the level of experience, education and complexity of the position applied for.

Each GS grade has 10 pay steps. Currently, a GS-9 starts at \$41,563 for step 1 and reaches \$54,028 per year at step 10 (not including locality pay adjustments). At the GS-9 grade, each pay step adds \$1,385 to the annual salary. Pay steps are earned based on time in service and the employee’s work performance. General

Schedule employees are referred to as white-collar workers under the federal classification system. There are 36 locality pay areas. Visit [www.federaljobs.net](http://www.federaljobs.net) for specific locality pay information for your area. All of the 36 locality pay areas adjust the base salary in a range from 9.44% to 35.15%.

**TABLE 1-3  
Annual Salary Base Rates (Without Locality)  
2011 General Schedule (GS)**

<b>General Schedule (GS) Step Increases 1-10 in Dollars</b>										
<b>G S</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>
1	17,803	18,398	18,990	19,579	20,171	20,519	21,104	21,694	21,717	22,269
2	20,017	20,493	21,155	21,717	21,961	22,607	23,253	23,899	24,545	25,191
3	21,840	22,568	23,296	24,024	24,752	25,480	26,208	26,936	27,664	28,392
4	24,518	25,335	26,152	26,969	27,786	28,603	29,420	30,237	31,054	31,871
5	27,431	28,345	29,259	30,173	31,087	32,001	32,915	33,829	34,743	35,667
6	30,577	31,596	32,615	33,634	34,653	35,672	36,691	37,710	38,729	39,748
7	33,979	35,112	36,245	37,378	38,511	39,644	40,777	41,910	43,043	44,176
8	37,631	38,885	40,139	41,393	42,647	43,901	45,155	46,409	47,663	48,917
9	41,563	42,948	44,333	45,718	47,103	48,488	49,873	51,258	52,643	54,028
10	45,771	47,297	48,823	50,349	51,875	53,401	54,927	56,453	57,979	59,505
11	50,287	51,963	53,639	55,315	56,991	58,667	60,343	62,019	63,695	65,371
12	60,274	62,283	64,292	66,301	68,310	70,319	72,328	74,337	76,346	78,355
13	71,674	74,063	76,452	78,841	81,230	83,619	86,008	88,397	90,786	93,175
14	84,697	87,520	90,343	93,166	95,989	98,812	101,635	104,458	107,281	110,104
15	99,628	102,949	106,270	109,591	112,912	116,233	119,554	122,875	126,196	129,517

Approximately 10 percent of total federal non-postal employment is classified under the Wage Grade (WG) blue-collar pay schedules. Wage Grade workers are placed in a five step pay system and the pay is based on competitive rates that are established by an annual wage survey. The Department of Defense employs the largest number of Wage Grade workers.



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### Sample of Wage Grade (WG) Occupations

WG-2502 Telephone Mechanic	WG-4204 Pipefitting
WG-2892 Aircraft Electrician	WG-4417 Offset Press Operating
WG-3314 Instrument Making	WG-4754 Cemetery Caretaking
WG-3502 Laboring	WG-5220 Shipwright
WG-3703 Welding	WG-5788 Deckhand
WG-3919 Television Equip.	WG-7304 Laundry Working
WG-4102 Painting	WG-7404 Cooking

See Appendix D for a complete list of WG occupations.

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There are a number of special compensation systems that augment the general schedule. Physicians receive signing bonuses for a one-year continued-service agreement and additional bonuses for two years. The Federal Aviation Administration pays employees in safety-related careers under a “Core Compensation” multi-pay band system. Organizations such as the General Accounting Office (GAO), NASA, and the Commerce Department’s National Institute of Standards and Technology either are exempt from or have exceptions to the GS pay system.

The SES is a corps of men and women, composed of those who administer public programs at the top levels of federal government. Some positions include additional recruitment incentives. The SES programs and application guidance are included in Chapter Six.

<b>Structure of the SES Pay System</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>
Agencies with a Certified SES Performance Appraisal System	\$119,544	\$179,700
Agencies without a Certified SES Performance Appraisal System	\$119,544	\$165,300

Pay reform has been implemented to offset competitive hiring pressures from private industry and local governments. Agencies can now offer allowances and bonuses when recruiting, match salary within certain limits, and are authorized to pay interview travel expenses under certain circumstances.

**Table 1-4****Average annual 2009 salaries for GS full-time workers**

<b>Occupations (<i>Selected occupations</i>)</b>	<b>Salary</b>
All Occupations	\$74,403
General attorney	128,422
Financial management	119,671
General engineer	114,839
Air Traffic Controller	109,218
Economist	108,010
Chemistry	101,687
Computer science	100,657
Microbiology	97,264
Architecture	94,056
Criminal investigating	93,897
Customs & border protection	92,558
Statistics	92,322
Accounting	91,541
Information technology management	91,104
Librarian	84,796
Ecology	84,283
Human resource management	81,837
Budget analysis	80,456
Nurse	77,166
Chaplain	75,485
Mine safety and health	75,222
Engineering technical	69,092
Medical technologist	64,774
Border patrol agent	59,594
Correctional Officer	53,459
Police	52,058
Legal assistance	48,668
Fire protection and prevention	48,166
Secretary	46,384
Tax examining	42,035
Human resource assistant	40,334

SOURCE: U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2009 & CBO Report

## VACATION AND SICK LEAVE

All employees receive 10 paid holidays, 13 days of vacation for the first three years service, 20 days of vacation with three to 15 years of service, and 26 days after 15 years. Additionally, 13 sick days are accrued each year regardless of length of service and employees can carry over any sick leave accumulation to the next year. Many federal employees accrue sick leave balances of a year or more during their career. The author had 2100 hours of sick leave, just over one year, accumulated when he retired in 2005. He was able to exchange his sick leave balance for an increase in his annuity payment. Military time may be creditable for annual leave and retirement benefits. For example, if you have three years of military service, you could earn 20 vacation days per year rather than 13 like most first time Federal employees. Military service may also be creditable toward your Federal retirement if a deposit is made. For additional information on military deposits visit <http://federalretirement.net/militarybuyback.htm>.

## HEALTH AND LIFE INSURANCE

Medical health plans and the Federal Employees' Group Life Insurance (FEGLI) programs are available to most employees. The Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) plan is an employee-employer contribution system and includes fee-for-service, consumer-driven, point-of-service, and HMO options. The costs are reasonable and the coverage excellent.

The federal government offers low cost comprehensive dental and vision care under the Federal Employees Dental & Vision Insurance Program (FEDVIP). Coverage is available from a number of healthcare providers and is competitively priced with standard and high options. The FEGLI program offers low-cost term life insurance for the employee and basic coverage for the family. FEGLI offers up to five times the employee's salary in death benefits.

One of the primary benefits of federal employment is the satisfaction you experience from working in a challenging and rewarding job. Positions are available with the level of responsibility and authority that you desire. The average benefits package for a federal employee exceeds \$41,000 annually.

## RETIREMENT

The federal retirement system is based on Social Security contributions, a Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS) annuity, and the Thrift Savings Plan (TSP); an employee contribution system fashioned after a 401k defined contribution plan. You can elect to contribute up to maximum allowable into the (TSP) savings plan. FERS employees receive 1 percent automatically and the government matches the next 3 percent contributed by the employee and 50 cents per dollar for the next 2 percent contributed. Therefore, if you contribute a minimum of 5 percent Uncle Sam matches 5 percent. New hires should consider contributing a minimum of 5 percent to receive a 5 percent match from the government.

*New hires should consider contributing a minimum of 5 percent to receive a full match from the government.*

Contributions are tax-deferred and reduce taxable income by the amount contributed. The retirement benefit is determined by the amount accumulated during the employee's career. This includes the interest earned and capital gains realized from the retirement fund. Visit [www.federaljobs.net/retire](http://www.federaljobs.net/retire), our retirement planning Web site, for complete information and details about the federal retirement system.

There are many withdrawal options, including lump sum and various fixed term annuities. The TSP plan contribution payout is in addition to your federal retirement annuity and Social Security benefits that you will be eligible for at retirement.

## CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Each department and agency determines required training and offers workers opportunities to improve job skills and gain knowledge to be successful in their careers. Career development training includes technical or skills training, tuition assistance or reimbursement, fellows programs outlined in Chapter Three, and executive leadership and management training programs, seminars, and workshops. Training may be offered on the job, by another agency, or at local colleges and universities. Visit [www.fedcareer.info](http://www.fedcareer.info) for detailed information on the government's "Individual Development Plan" program.



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Visit [www.fedcareer.info](http://www.fedcareer.info)  
for career development guidance

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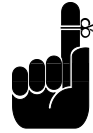
Today there are many diverse opportunities for self-development and one of the major initiatives is online and computer-based instruction. Most agencies offer extensive online courses for skills improvement and career development. I encourage all federal employees to take advantage of these programs to enhance their promotion potential and to improve their skills. Some courses are required by the position. However, most are designed to improve job performance.

Starting in my early thirties I took advantage of many agency-sponsored training programs that helped me prepare — and eventually be selected for — supervisory and management positions. I completed evening college courses receiving reimbursement for up to 50 percent of my tuition, attended seminars, signed up for agency correspondence courses, and volunteered for temporary and lateral assignments throughout my 35-year career. I used the courses to improve my writing, automation, organizational, and interpersonal skills. When I was assigned to complete a course project, I developed the project around an actual work issue and eventually presented the project plans to management in the form of proactive work improvement plans and suggestions.

*I encourage all federal employees to take advantage of these programs to enhance their promotion potential and to improve their skills.*

The improvement plans and suggestions attracted the attention of upper management, and I believe this is why I was selected for my first supervisory position at the early age of 35. I was selected from a group of applicants who were older and had considerably more experience.

At each juncture of my career I used career development training to improve productivity, soft skills such as interpersonal behavior and management skills, and technical expertise. I developed comprehensive Individual Development Plans (IDPs) shortly after reporting for my first job with the Federal Aviation Administration in 1975 and revised my plan annually throughout my career. I believe this is why I was successful in working my way up through the ranks from a GS-0856-07 step 1 grade to my final senior management position when I retired in 2005 from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). My last position was air traffic control tower technical operations manager at the Greater Pittsburgh International Airport. Learn more about the IDP process at [www.fedcareer.info](http://www.fedcareer.info) and my book, the second edition of *Take Charge of Your Federal Career*.



You will find extensive leadership programs in the form of conferences, seminars, residential courses, general coursework, developmental assignments, coaching initiatives, distance learning, lectures, mentoring, workshops, on-the-job training and much more. The programs are offered either to federal employees from specific agencies or to all federal employees, and there are opportunities for non-federal employees as well.

## TYPES OF TRAINING

- Orientation Training (New Employees)
- Technical and Administrative Skills Training
- Professional Training
- Supervisory Training
- Executive and Management Training
- Career Development Training
- Required training for safety or EEO

Career development programs are offered by most agencies for target positions and personal long term career goals. Each agency offers its own unique programs. However, they are all authorized by the same federal regulations and many similarities exist between agencies. The following is a sampling of currently offered career development programs.

*Appendix B  
provides a  
comprehensive  
federal agency and  
department  
directory.*

## WHERE THE JOBS ARE

Fifteen Cabinet departments and more than 100 independent agencies compose the federal government system. These departments and agencies have offices in all corners of the world. The size of each agency varies considerably. The larger the agency, the more diverse the opportunities. Appendix B provides a comprehensive federal agency directory and Appendix D offers a cross reference of your skills and education to specific hiring agencies.

Agencies are like corporations in the sense that each agency has a headquarters office, typically located in Washington D.C., regional offices located around the country to manage large geographic areas, and many satellite offices to provide public services and to perform agency functions. A good example is the Social Security Administration, which has offices in most areas to administer the Social Security program; manage disability claims, sign up those who retire at 62 and again at age 65 when they are required to elect Medicare options, etc.

Jobs can be found in all parts of the country and overseas — even in places you might never imagine. Don't exclude any location regardless of size. In 1975 I was hired by the FAA to work at the Philipsburg Airport in central Pennsylvania. Philipsburg is a small town of 3,056 and I maintained navigational aids and communications facilities at the airport and State College. One of the main reasons I was hired was that few bid on these remote-location jobs. If you want to be successful in your job search, expand your area of consideration. It took me three years to get trained and transfer back to my home town.

To locate potential employers and federal offices in your area, check the blue pages in your phone book, and start networking as described in Chapter Four using the informational interview process. A comprehensive agency directory is available in Appendix B. Locate the agencies in your area to find out what jobs may be available or soon become available. Visit [www.federaljobs.net](http://www.federaljobs.net) and follow the links to 141 federal personnel offices and agency employment sites to explore available careers and locate job vacancies. Chapter Three will show you how to find job vacancies and what jobs are available.

If you desire to travel, the government offers abundant opportunities to relocate within the 50 states and overseas. Chapter Eight provides information on overseas employment opportunities including qualifications, hiring agency contact information, and much more. Twelve federal agencies and departments offer employment abroad for more than 89,204 workers. The Department of Defense Dependent Schools system employ hundreds of teachers for military dependent schools overseas.

The state with the largest number of employees is California with 356,545 and Delaware the least with 3,270. All of the 315 Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSA) in the U.S. and Puerto Rico have federal civilian employment as listed in the Central Personnel Data File. Small towns and rural areas outside of MSAs have

*If you want to be successful in your job search, expand your area of consideration.*



approximately 18 percent of total non-postal federal workers.<sup>4</sup> The actual number of federal civilian employees is greater than the above figures. The Defense Intelligence Agency, Central Intelligence Agency, and the National Security Agency do not release their data. Chapter Three provides job resources to help you find jobs.

## EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS

In the federal government, 55 percent of all workers do not have a college degree. The level of required education is dependent upon the job applied for. Each job announcement lists needed skills and abilities including education and work experience. However, the more education and work experience you have, the more competitive you will be when ranked against other applicants. A sample qualification statement is presented in Chapter Two for administration and management positions. The majority of positions within the government have a published qualifications standard similar to the provided example.

You can review and download a specific qualification standard online at [www.federaljobs.net](http://www.federaljobs.net). You can often substitute work experience for a college degree in many fields. Refer to the qualification standard in Chapter Two, you will find that you can substitute three years, one year equivalent to at least a GS-4, of general work experience for a four-year course of study leading to a bachelor's degree. Many look at the job announcement and see "***Bachelor's Degree***" and pass up the job not knowing that three years general experience could qualify them for the position. Read the entire job announcement, front to back, before eliminating the job from consideration.

*Many look at the job announcement and see "Bachelor's Degree" and pass up the job not knowing that three years of general experience could qualify them for the position.*

## CIVIL SERVICE EXAM INTRODUCTION

Over 80 percent of all jobs do not require a written entrance exam. Uncle Sam rates most applicants through an extensive review of their work experience and/or education that is stated on their application or federal style résumé. Tests are required for specific groups including secretarial/clerical, air traffic control, law enforcement and certain entry level jobs. However, there are exceptions to those occupations as well. For example, if you apply for clerical positions with many agencies, they often waive the entrance exam and require you to fill out a comprehensive "*Occupational Questionnaire*" and you may also be able to self-certify your typing speed.

Chapter Five provides sample test questions and offers detailed testing information and guidance. You will also be able to determine if the occupation that you are applying for requires a written entrance exam.

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<sup>4</sup> Federal Civilian Employment by State & Metropolitan Areas (CPDF)

**TABLE 1-5**  
**FEDERAL EMPLOYMENT BY STATE — SEPTEMBER 2010**  
*Non-Postal*

STATE	TOTAL	STATE	TOTAL
Alabama	36,634	Nevada	10,944
Alaska	13,833	New Hampshire	4,193
Arizona	41,229	New Jersey	28,496
Arkansas	13,954	New Mexico	26,433
California	158,635	New York	61,010
Colorado	38,195	North Carolina	40,549
Connecticut	8,128	North Dakota	6,536
Delaware	3,270	Ohio	48,402
Florida	82,356	Oklahoma	38,650
Georgia	75,123	Oregon	21,750
Hawaii	25,056	Pennsylvania	61,587
Idaho	10,280	Rhode Island	6,860
Illinois	43,006	South Carolina	20,871
Indiana	23,522	South Dakota	8,672
Iowa	8,688	Tennessee	27,298
Kansas	16,587	Texas	127,859
Kentucky	25,499	Utah	29,226
Louisiana	19,935	Vermont	4,406
Maine	10,866	Virginia	135,298
Maryland	106,391	Washington	54,852
Massachusetts	26,296	Washington, D.C.	128,324
Michigan	27,693	West Virginia	15,620
Minnesota	17,653	Wisconsin	14,830
Mississippi	18,052	Wyoming	6,568
Missouri	33,178	Overseas	89,204
Montana	11,770	*Unspecified	39,980
Nebraska	10,359		