
2010-2011 Federal Legal Employment Opportunities Guide



2010-2011 Federal Legal Employment Opportunities Guide

FOREWORD & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The 2010-11 Federal Legal Employment Opportunities Guide is a publication of NALP/PSLawNet, with important contributions from the Partnership for Public Service.

Both the online content and print version of the Guide are the products of hard work and creative thinking from NALP members as well as our friends at the Partnership. We wish to thank:

- Jennifer Close of the Partnership for Public Service and her colleagues who, as always, researched and dug up a large quantity of data and statistics on federal legal careers;
- Katie Dilks, NALP's 2009-10 PSLawNet Fellow, who facilitated updates and contributed valuable content to the Guide;
- All members of NALP's Government Job-seeking Resources Work Group, who will continue to provide updated content and produce new resources in response to the law school community's needs; and
- Carolyng Gomes, PSLawNet's Summer Publications Coordinator, who tirelessly edited Guide content.

We hope that you find this print version of the Guide, which is an abridged version of the online content, to be a useful resource. We encourage you to view all of PSLawNet's federal career resources at <http://www.pslawnet.org/federalgovernmentresources>.

If you have questions or suggestions, please contact me at sgrumm@nalp.org.

- *Steve Grumm, NALP Director of Public Service Initiatives*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>PAGE</u>
PART ONE: INTRODUCTION & HOW TO USE THE GUIDE.....	3
PART TWO: WHY WORK FOR THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT?.....	4
PART THREE: TYPES OF PRACTICE FOR LAWYERS IN THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT.....	5
PART FOUR: WHERE ARE THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT JOBS AND WHAT ARE THE AVENUES TO APPLY FOR THEM?.....	7
PART FIVE: RESOURCES TO HELP YOU FIND FEDERAL GOVERNMENT JOBS.....	11
PART SIX: COMPENSATION AND LRAP.....	13
PART SEVEN: HOW DO I MAKE MY APPLICATION A SUCCESS?.....	16

PART ONE: INTRODUCTION & HOW TO USE THE GUIDE

At first glance, seeking and applying for federal jobs can seem incredibly overwhelming, and job-seekers may not know where to begin. The Guide contains:

- information about the benefits of a career in federal government;
- a look at the various kinds of work attorneys perform;
- an overview of where the most attorney jobs are (and will be) in the executive branch;
- resources to aid in finding the ideal opportunity; and
- tips on application processes.

NOTE: in addition to content offered in the Guide, NALP offers expanded content and resources on PSLawNet's Federal Government Careers Webpage:

<http://www.pslawnet.org/federalgovernmentresources>. We encourage readers to use the online content in tandem with the Guide. Online content offers the ability to:

- browse a clickable table of contents to immediately identify the most useful content;
- use dozens of hyperlinks in the web content to click through to numerous useful online federal career resources; and
- benefit from continuous addition to and revision of online content instead of waiting for the annually updated print edition.

Nevertheless, there is great value in having a hard-copy resource to print, read, mark up, and share with others. In the following pages, we highlight the key elements from the online content and direct readers to visit PSLawNet and other websites for additional resources.

PART TWO: WHY WORK FOR THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT?

Federal employment offers significant responsibility early in one's career, intellectually challenging work, and unique opportunities to serve the public good in any number of capacities. In addition, the federal government offers the highest attorney salaries in the public sector and wonderful work/life benefits, including reasonable and flexible work hours. Aside from work on criminal matters – profiled on PSLawNet's Prosecutor/Public Defender Careers page at <http://pslawnet.org/prosecutor-publicdefendercareers> – government lawyers work on everything from constitutional issues to coal mine safety regulation. Also, they work in all three branches of government, although most are employed in the executive branch.

Reasons to consider federal employment:

- *Guess Who's Hiring?* – Economic recession notwithstanding, an expected large-scale retirement by Baby Boomers in the next decade, along with changes in policy priorities which necessitate additional contributions from lawyers, are likely to leave many federal positions open for new attorneys to fill.
- *From Constitutional Law to Coal Mine Regulation* – There is an enormous variety of legal work to be done in the federal government. Attorneys work in all three branches of government in numerous capacities, including litigating civil and criminal cases, counseling lawmakers, drafting statutes and regulations, issuing administrative legal opinions, and much more. Remember, also, that “attorney” is not the only job type to look for. Other legal specialties include contract specialists, administrative law judges, and more.
- *Immediate Responsibility* – Attorneys working for the federal government develop key leadership skills quickly as a result of managing their own caseloads and other significant immediate responsibilities.
- *Where in the World?* – 85% of federal jobs are located outside of the Washington, DC area, and almost 50,000 federal employees work outside the United States.
- *Lighten the Debt Load* – Many federal agencies have their own loan repayment assistance programs. Learn more about federal student loan repayment programs at <http://www.makingthedifference.org/federalbenefits/loanrepayment.shtml>, and note that the College Cost Reduction & Access Act can benefit attorneys working in the federal government. Learn more about the CCRAA on Equal Justice Works' Student Debt Relief page at <http://www.equaljusticeworks.org/resources/student-debt-relief/default>.
- *High-end Public Interest Pay* – Federal jobs tend to pay better than jobs with nonprofit organizations. Starting salaries for entry-level federal attorneys are generally in the \$50,000 range. From there, federal attorneys can move up the salary scale quickly.

Pick up more general information about federal government career opportunities at Making the Difference, a federal careers website operated jointly by the Office of Personnel Management and the Partnership for Public Service:
<http://www.makingthedifference.org/index.shtml>.

PART THREE: TYPES OF PRACTICE FOR LAWYERS IN THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

Branches of Government

All three branches of the federal government employ attorneys: the **executive** (the President and his or her administration), the **legislative** (the Senate and the House of Representatives), and the **judicial**. In addition, the federal government includes many independent agencies such as the National Labor Relations Board, the Federal Communications Commission, the Federal Reserve System and the Legal Services Corporation. Among the three branches and independent agencies, the executive branch and independent agencies employ the greatest number of attorneys. In 2008, there were some 97,000 employees with full-time, permanent legal positions with executive and independent agencies. In contrast, the number of attorney jobs in the legislature is smaller, as is the number of jobs with the judiciary. (For more information about working for Congress, see Yale Law School's Guide, "Working on Capitol Hill" at http://www.law.yale.edu/documents/pdf/CDO_Public/2010_PUBLIC_CAPITOL_HILL_GUIDE_FINAL.pdf.)

Practice Areas

When most law students think of being a lawyer, they think of litigation – filing and trying lawsuits in court. But lawyers in the federal government are just as likely to draft and interpret regulations, advise and counsel other federal employees, and shape policy.

- **Litigation** – If you know you want to litigate, consider the Department of Justice (DOJ). DOJ is the central agency for the enforcement of federal laws and consequently is the main litigating branch of the U.S. government. DOJ is composed of headquarters in DC and 93 U.S. Attorney's Offices throughout the country. DOJ hires dozens of recent law graduates every year through the Attorney General's Honors Program (<http://www.justice.gov/oarm/arm/hp/hp.htm>); most Honors positions are in DC, though a few are in other major cities throughout the country. Honors Attorneys work in various offices that range from Civil Rights to the Executive Office for Immigration Review. Some attorneys at DOJ do not litigate but instead provide advice and counsel; for example, attorneys in the Office of Legal Counsel and the Federal Bureau of Prisons rarely litigate and focus instead on providing analysis and advice. In addition to DOJ, attorneys at many other federal agencies are also involved in litigation. Offices with independent litigating authority include the Department of Labor, Office of the Solicitor and the Securities Exchange Commission, Division of Enforcement. Finally, the majority of agencies have "coordinate jurisdiction" with DOJ, meaning that DOJ attorneys initiate all lawsuits and handle any depositions and oral arguments, while the agency attorneys draft the legal papers and provide the subject-matter expertise.
- **Regulatory** – Regulatory lawyers are at the forefront of forming and enforcing new rules. Agencies such as the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Occupational Safety and Health

- Administration (OSHA), and many others are considered regulatory agencies, because they are empowered to create and implement rules and regulations.
- **Advisory** – If you think you would enjoy working with clients to help them comply with the law, you should investigate “attorney advisor” or “counselor” positions. For example, lawyers at the Food and Drug Administration are divided into “counselors” and “litigators.” The counselors work on congressional inquiries, Freedom of Information Act requests, rulemaking and citizen petitions.
 - **Public Policy** – Individuals who want to work in public policy should look beyond “attorney” positions. Agencies that are engaged in a lot of policy work include the Department of State, Department of Commerce, and Congressional Research Service. An excellent point of entry to federal policy-making is the Presidential Management Fellows Program (PMF). The PMF Program is a two-year fellowship that places over 700 graduating graduate students (including J.D. 3Ls and LL.M.s) in public policy and management positions with executive agencies. Possible placements include the Department of Defense, the Millennium Challenge Corporation, the Department of State, the Department of Health and Human Services, and many other agencies. Detailed information is available at the PMF website: <https://pmf.opm.gov/>.

PART FOUR: WHERE THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT JOBS ARE - FINDING JOBS AND IDENTIFYING THE AVENUES TO GET TO THEM

This section offers data on current federal attorney staffing and anticipated future hiring needs, reviews the most common points of entry to employment for attorneys **and law students**, and highlights opportunities for legal careers in the U.S. military.

Where the Jobs Are, and Where They Will Be

There are currently 110,159 employees working in the legal field in the federal government. Examples of these types of jobs include attorneys, law clerks, paralegal specialists and contract representatives. The following figures take account of individuals working in the United States, U.S. territories, foreign countries and unspecified locations; they include cabinet level agencies and large, medium and small independent agencies. At the cabinet level, the agencies that employ the most individuals in legal positions are:

<u>Agency</u>	<u>Employees as of March 2010</u>
Department of the Treasury	20,389
Department of Veterans Affairs	17,189
Department of Justice	16,842
Department of Defense	6,069
Department of Homeland Security	3,235

There are currently 33,829 general attorneys employed by the federal government in the United States, U.S. territories, foreign countries and unspecified locations; this figure includes cabinet level agencies and large, medium and small independent agencies. At the cabinet level, the agencies that employ the most attorneys are:

<u>Agency</u>	<u>Employees as of March 2010</u>
Department of Justice	10,541
Department of Defense	3,252
Department of the Treasury	2,367
Department of Homeland Security	1,897
Department of Veterans Affairs	925

According to the Partnership for Public Service’s *Where the Jobs Are: Mission-Critical Opportunities for America* research report - <http://www.ourpublicservice.org/OPS/publications/viewcontentdetails.php?id=118> - the federal government will need to fill 23,596 positions in the legal field between FY 2010 and 2012. Of these openings, 5,784 are specifically for attorneys.

<u>Top Agencies Hiring for Attorneys</u>	<u>Projected Hires FY 2010-12</u>
Department of Justice	2,700
Department of Homeland Security	745
Securities and Exchange Commission	441
Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation	389
Department of the Treasury	339

Additional Notes: There is a wide variety of opportunities available for both attorneys and individuals with legal backgrounds at federal agencies across government. From the Federal Communications Commission to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and every office in-between, the federal government is looking for attorneys and legal professionals, and it is important that you do your homework to determine which agencies best fit your interests and skill set before applying for positions. To learn more about various agencies, their missions and available positions, visit individual agency Web sites, USA.gov, USAJOBS.gov, and makingthedifference.org.

Common Points of Entry for Students, Recent Graduates, and Experienced Attorneys

Student Internships

Just about every legal office in the federal government hosts summer interns and most host interns during the academic year as well. A terrific resource for finding these opportunities is the Government Honors & Internship Guide - <http://www.law.arizona.edu/career/honorshandbook.cfm> - published by the University of Arizona College of Law, which highlights summer and entry-level opportunities at a number of agencies. Annual online subscriptions are available to law schools for distribution to their students and graduates. Law students and graduates should contact their career services offices for information on this resource.

Many federal offices hire paid interns as well as volunteers. For 1Ls, compensation for paid internships is generally based on the GS-7 scale, or \$7500 for ten weeks of work, while 2Ls are paid based on the GS-9 scale, or approximately \$9250 for ten weeks of work. Compensation varies by agency.

Recent Law Graduates/Entry-Level Attorneys

There are three primary avenues through which recent law school graduates seek federal government employment:

- *Direct Hiring* - All three branches routinely hire attorneys and staffers with legal training. The main conduit for finding and applying for federal jobs is the U.S. Office of Personnel Management's (OPM) Official Job Site - <http://www.usajobs.gov/> - called USA Jobs. (More information on USA Jobs is found in Section Five below, and note that not all attorney positions may be posted on USA Jobs.) Current 3Ls should know that many agencies require applicants to have passed a bar exam, but some agencies will post opportunities for which graduating students are eligible, and the successful applicant will have a specified time period in which to sit for and be admitted to a bar.
- *Honors Programs* - Many federal agencies hire new attorneys primarily (and sometimes solely) through an "Honors Program." Honors Programs are usually two-year commitments after which most or all participants convert to permanent federal employees. The most comprehensive

resource for post-graduate Honors Programs is the Government Honors & Internship Guide -

<http://www.law.arizona.edu/career/honorshandbook.cfm>. Your law school likely has a subscription to this resource. Please check with your career services office. Here are just *some* examples of federal Attorney Honors Programs:

- Central Intelligence Agency Legal Honors Program:
<https://www.cia.gov/offices-of-cia/general-counsel/careers/honors-attorneys-program.html>
- Department of Homeland Security General Counsel's Honors Program:
http://www.dhs.gov/xabout/careers/gc_1192223920159.shtm#2
- Department of Justice Attorney General Honors Program:
<http://www.usdoj.gov/oarm/arm/hp/hp.htm>
- Department of Labor, Solicitor's Honors Program:
<http://www.dol.gov/sol/honorsprogram.htm>
- *The Presidential Management Fellows (PMF) Program* - <https://www.pmf.opm.gov/> - is a competitive program that recruits masters, law, and doctoral-level graduating students to policy and management jobs (not attorney positions) in the federal government. Students must apply in the fall of their final year of school and should contact their career service offices for information on the nomination and application process.

Graduates may also consider civil service jobs for which a law degree may be useful but not a requirement, such as Paralegal, Hearings and Appeals Specialist, Labor Relations Specialist, Policy Analyst, Estate Tax Examiner, and others. See Attorneys in the Federal Service - <http://www.usajobs.gov/EI24.asp> - on USA Jobs for information on attorney positions as well as non-attorney legal positions.

Experienced Attorneys

USA Jobs is a primary conduit for finding and applying for federal jobs - <http://www.usajobs.gov/> - but information on federal attorney positions may be found elsewhere as well. More information on USA Jobs and other resources is included in Section Five below. In addition to attorney positions, experienced professionals may consider a position as an Administrative Law Judge (ALJ). Many agencies, including the Securities and Exchange Commission, the Social Security Administration, and the Department of Labor, hire attorneys with at least seven years experience for these positions. ALJs conduct hearings to resolve disputes between government agencies and persons affected by decisions of that agency. The Office of Personnel Management administers ALJ examinations.

Note: More information about finding jobs is found in Part 5 below.

Practicing Law in the Military

A military legal career offers immediate responsibility and exposure to a wide variety of law, from criminal to contract. There are different branches of the military in which you can serve as JAG Corps attorney, either as an entry-level or experienced attorney:

- United States Air Force JAG Corps - <http://www.jagusaf.hq.af.mil/EDprgrms/howtobecome.htm>
- United States Army JAG Corps - http://www.goarmy.com/jag/about_army_jag_corps.jsp
- United States Coast Guard JAG Corps - <http://www.uscg.mil/legal/>
- United States Marine JAG Corps - http://www.marines.mil/unit/judgeadvocate/Pages/Home/SJA_to_the_CM_C.aspx
- United States Navy JAG Corps - http://www.jag.navy.mil/careers/careers/inbrief_overview.html

PART FIVE: RESOURCES TO HELP YOU FIND FEDERAL GOVERNMENT JOBS

- USA Jobs - <http://www.usajobs.gov/> - As noted above, this is the official job site of the United States Government, and the majority of all federal job openings are posted on this website. You can complete a job search by job type, location, salary, agency and other criteria. Job seekers can become members of USA Jobs, at no cost, and then post resumes online, apply to jobs directly through the website, and receive automated email alerts of recent job openings. For tips on searching the database, see: http://jobsearch.usajobs.gov/help/Help.aspx?k=keyword_tips. Also, visit USA Jobs' "Attorneys in the Federal Service" page - <http://www.usajobs.gov/EI24.asp> - for more information on attorney career opportunities and hiring procedures. **Note that while USA Jobs is a valuable resource for attorney position announcements, in some cases federal agencies use streamlined procedures for hiring attorneys and should be contacted directly about potential opportunities. This is particularly true for the Department of Justice, which has a robust recruitment site at <http://www.justice.gov/oarm/>.**
- Westlaw's Law School Website contains a robust, searchable database of federal agencies and entities. This is a useful resource for gathering information about what myriad federal offices do, and what roles law students and attorneys may play in them. The database is searchable by agency/employer, practice area, and location. Before trying to access this password-protected database, readers should check with their law school's career service office to see if it is available to them. If it is:
 1. Go to <http://lawschool.westlaw.com> and sign in with the appropriate username and password;
 2. Click on "Career Resources" on the menu atop the page;
 3. Click on "Law Student Jobs Online" from the selections on the page;
 4. Click on the "Federal Careers for Attorneys" selection under the "Legal Career Center" heading.
 5. Begin searching!
- United States Government Policy and Supporting Positions Book - http://www.gpoaccess.gov/plumbook/2008/2008_plum_book.pdf - This publication, commonly referred to as the *Plum Book*, is produced every four years, just after the presidential election. The *Plum Book* contains data (as of September 1, 2008) on over 7,000 Federal jobs that are political appointee positions. If you find a position that interests you, apply directly through that agency.
- The University of Arizona Government Honors and Internship Handbook - <http://www.law.arizona.edu/career/honorshandbook.cfm> - This handbook provides application information and deadlines for federal, state and local honors programs and internships, including deadline tables arranged alphabetically by agency and by class year. The guide is geared to current students seeking summer employment and entry-level positions. Annual online subscriptions are available to law schools for distribution to their students and

graduates. Law students and graduates should contact their career services offices for information on accessing this resource.

- Working on Capitol Hill - http://www.law.yale.edu/documents/pdf/CDO_Public/2010_PUBLIC_CAPITOL_HILL_GUIDE_FINAL.pdf - Yale Law School's guidebook breaks down the types of employment opportunities available on the Hill and includes personal narratives from Hill employees.
- Guide to Criminal Prosecution Careers - http://www.law.yale.edu/documents/pdf/CDO_Public/PUBLIC-Crim_Prosecution_Guide_2009.pdf - This Yale Law School publication provides information on both summer and permanent hiring processes in U.S. Attorneys' and local prosecutors' offices. (For more information on careers in criminal justice, see PSLawNet's Prosecution/Public Defense Career Resource page: <http://pslawnet.org/prosecutor-publicdefendercareers>.)

PART SIX: COMPENSATION AND LRAP

Government Salaries

Most white-collar federal jobs, including attorney positions, fall under the General Schedule (or GS) pay scale. On this scale, jobs are ranked according to level of responsibility and difficulty and are assigned corresponding grades. Grades start at GS-1 and go up to GS-15, and then into the Senior Executive Service (SES). As grades increase, salaries increase correspondingly. Within each grade level there are several steps, often as many as ten. Length of tenure in a position and job performance can bump employees up by steps within their grade; this will also lead to a salary increase.

Master's level graduates usually enter at level GS-9 or higher, depending upon prior work experience. Special rules allow agencies to pay attorneys more, so law school graduates often start at GS-11 or higher, depending on whether the applicant is entering an honors program or has experience from a judicial clerkship. This generally means a starting salary somewhere between \$50,000 and \$75,000.

Why the wide range? The federal government has both base pay tables and "locality pay" tables. In metropolitan areas such as San Francisco or New York City, federal employees earn a higher salary to compensate for the higher cost of living, earning significantly more than base pay. Areas that do not have a locality pay formula are covered by the standard GS formula. The full 2010 General Schedule table and all 2010 locality pay tables can be found at <http://www.opm.gov/oca/10tables/indexGS.asp>.

While the GS serves as the salary scale for most federal attorneys, there are notable exceptions. Among the groups that do not follow the GS:

- Assistant United States Attorneys (AUSAs) are not compensated via the GS. Rather, they are compensated under an administratively-determined (AD) pay scale authorized by Title 28 of the U.S. Code. (Other attorneys working for the Department of Justice are compensated via the GS. For more information on salaries, promotions, and benefits in the Department of Justice, see <http://www.usdoj.gov/oarm/arm/hp/hpsalary.htm>.)
- Attorneys working for the Securities and Exchange Commission are paid separately from the GS as well. You may learn more at <http://www.sec.gov/jobs/lawyers.htm>.
- Administrative Law Judges (ALJs) are compensated according to the separate pay scale at Title 5 U.S. Code, Section 5372. More information about ALJ salaries is found at <http://www.opm.gov/oca/pay/html/ALJ-PaySystem.asp>.
- The Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, the National Credit Union Administration Board, the Comptroller of the Currency, the Federal Housing Finance Board, the Farm Credit Administration, the Commodity Futures Trading Commission, and the Office of Thrift Supervision have independent pay scales as

authorized by Title 12 U.S. Code, Section 1833b.

For certain hard-to-fill positions, departments and agencies may be able to offer a special pay rate that allows them to increase salaries for potential recruits. Examples of departments and agencies that use special pay rates include the Securities and Exchange Commission, Department of Justice, Internal Revenue Service (Office of Chief Counsel), Government Accountability Office, Department of Commerce, Department of Defense, the Army and Air Force JAG, Housing and Urban Development, and Health and Human Services.

Federal Loan Repayment Assistance Program (LRAP)

One of the biggest benefits of federal employment for recent law school graduates is student loan repayment assistance. Federal agencies are authorized to provide up to \$10,000 in loan repayment assistance per year for federal loans with a total lifetime cap of \$60,000 per employee. In exchange for each year that an employee accepts this benefit, she or he must commit to working for the federal government for an additional three years. If an employee accepts this benefit and leaves before this period expires, she or he must repay the full amount.

While not all agencies offer this benefit, many do. In 2008, 35 federal agencies provided more than \$51 million in loan repayment assistance to their employees; this represents a 22% increase from 2007. Of the 6,619 federal employees who received this benefit, 655 were attorneys.

The agencies that provided the most loan repayment assistance in 2008 were:

<u>Agency</u>	<u>Employee Count</u>	<u>Total Amount of Assistance</u>
Department of Justice	2,610	\$23,420,746
Department of Defense	1,286	\$7,797,349
Department of State	713	\$4,593,282
Securities and Exchange Commission	408	\$3,701,771
Department of Health and Human Services	287	\$2,281,518

To learn more about the Federal Student Loan Repayment Program, visit opm.gov or contact human resources representatives at the federal agencies you are most interested in.

College Cost Reduction & Access Act of 2007 (CCRAA)

Federal legislation titled the College Cost Reduction & Access Act created a new repayment option - called Income Based Repayment (IBR) - **AND** established a loan forgiveness program for public service lawyers that will forgive eligible federal educational debt after a 120-month (10-year) period of repayment. The program is designed so that after paying via IBR for a period of time, a public service lawyer may be qualified to have the rest of his or her eligible loans forgiven.

- Income-Based Repayment – Through IBR, high debt/low income borrowers can significantly reduce their monthly payments if they can demonstrate “partial

financial hardship,” as defined in the CCRAA statutory and regulatory language. It is essentially a calculation based on the amount of your eligible debt and your income. You do not have to be poverty-stricken to qualify for IBR; on the contrary, its provisions are generous.

- *Public Service Loan Forgiveness* – Borrowers working in a broadly-defined group of public service jobs may have qualified federal educational loans forgiven after a period of ten years (120 monthly payments) working in public service, provided that during that period they make monthly payments via the IBR Program (or through a combination of IBR and other payments).

For more information on CCRAA, visit these sites:

- Equal Justice Works Student Debt Resource Page: <http://www.equaljusticeworks.org/resources/student-debt-relief/default>
- The Project on Student Debt’s IBR Information Site: <http://ibrinfo.org/>.

PART SEVEN: HOW DO I MAKE MY APPLICATION A SUCCESS?

Changes on the Horizon

Navigating the federal hiring process can be cumbersome, but it is improving. The Obama Administration, in conjunction with the Office of Personnel Management and the Office of Management and Budget, has announced a set of hiring reforms that will streamline the process and make it more applicant-friendly.

This reform plan, which agencies must implement before November 1, 2010, will:

- cut the hiring time to roughly 80 days from the date that a vacancy is announced to the point that a candidate is hired;
- require agencies to communicate with applicants at four different points during the application process; and,
- eliminate the infamous Knowledge, Skills and Abilities (KSA) essays during the first step of the application process (see below for more information about KSAs).

We have included information about the two primary components of the initial application process, federal résumés and assessment tools, below.

Federal Résumés

Federal résumés are a critical component of the application process for government jobs and internships. These résumés, which are created on USAJOBS.gov, require more detail than a private sector résumé. Examples of the additional details that you will need for this document include information about your past employment, such as dates and number of hours worked per week, salary, as well as supervisor contact information.

One of the best features of USAJOBS.gov is that once you create an account, you can build and save up to five federal résumés, each tailored to a different position description; this is extremely important! Review the duties section found in each job vacancy announcement, identify the keywords in the description and include them in your résumé.

Assessment Tools

The federal government has traditionally used two assessment tools for applicants – questionnaires and essays. With regards to the former, many agencies will ask applicants to answer a variety of multiple choice questions; these questionnaires can contain upwards of 100 questions. If you are applying for a position on USAJOBS.gov, you can preview the questionnaire in the “How to Apply” section of the job vacancy announcement.

Agencies may also ask applicants to answer Knowledge, Skills and Abilities essays, better known as KSAs. These essays are meant to determine what makes an applicant stand out in a particular area. Examples of these essay questions include “Ability to communicate in writing” or “Knowledge in applying advanced IT principles.” There is

no set number of KSAs for a position; therefore, the number will vary by agency and opening.

Typically, a KSA response runs between a half-page and a full-page in length. When writing these essays, it is extremely important that you focus on the description of duties found in the job vacancy announcement. As you would when creating a federal résumé, you must identify the keywords and include them in your essays. Agencies will often use a computer to run keyword searches, so by using the words found in the position description, you will be sure to grab readers' attention.

As noted above, federal agencies are in the process of implementing a number of hiring reforms. One of these changes surrounds KSAs. After November 1, 2010, agencies cannot require applicants to answer these essays during the first step of the application process. It is likely that agencies will implement another type of assessment in place of these essays.

For more information about applying for federal positions, visit makingthedifference.org or opm.gov.

For more information on federal legal careers, visit PSLawNet's Federal Government Resources Page:
<http://www.pslawnet.org/federalgovernmentresources>. Good luck!