
Applying for Federal Jobs—Federal Resumes and KSA's

Prior to 1995, applying for a federal job required the completion of the SF-171, a cumbersome and confusing form. Now, you can use Optional Form (OF)-612, or you can create a federal resume to apply for jobs in the U.S. government. We recommend preparing a federal resume when applying for a federal job because it gives you more flexibility in emphasizing your specific skills as they relate to the particular vacancy.

Federal jobs are advertised through “vacancy announcements” which are published at the web site of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM), www.usajobs.opm.gov. When you apply, you must cite the specific vacancy number. Vacancy announcements are long and contain lots of bureaucratic and legal language, but you have to read the sections that include Major Duties, Required Qualifications, and Required Knowledge, Skills and Abilities. Those sections contain key words and specific information that will help you tailor your resume to be best suited for the position.

The federal government is in tremendous need of good employees as over 33% of all federal employees are eligible to retire by the end of 2005, and over 70% of the senior managers can retire by then. There's even a new organization, www.calltoserve.org, charged with increasing interest in public service. Hopefully, during your time as a student at the Sanford Institute, OPM will find ways to continue to streamline the application process. Have faith, and in the meantime, here are some tips for applying for federal jobs. In addition to the OPM web site, there's a great federal resume site at www.resume-place.com, and we have a book in the Career Services Office by the site's author that is also very useful.

Traditional Resumes v. Federal Resumes

The goal of a traditional resume is to summarize your skills and qualifications so that you get an interview for the job you want.

The goals of a federal resume are to meet the basic qualifications of the Vacancy Announcement, sell yourself over the competition and get you “best qualified” for the position—so that you get an interview. Your federal resume is specifically focused on the advertised vacancy.

You have some flexibility in the format of your federal resume, emphasizing your education and training or actual work experience, depending on what part of your background makes you best qualified for the position. You can exceed one page on a federal resume as well. However, a federal resume must include some information that is not necessary on a traditional resume, like:

- The announcement number, title and grade of the job you are applying for
- Full name, mailing address, daytime and evening phone numbers
- Social Security Number and Country of Citizenship
- Veterans' preference, Reinstatement eligibility, and Highest Federal civilian grade held (if applicable)
- High school (even if you have a higher degree) with zip code
- Zip codes (and addresses if available) for all educational institutions and employers
- Supervisors' names and telephone numbers, and indication if the reader may contact your current supervisor
- Salaries and number of hours worked, starting and ending dates for all previous jobs

Following is a breakdown of each section of the federal resume, and how to frame your qualifications to get considered for the position.

Header Section

The Header Section is where you include a lot of the personal information required. Here's a sample:

JANE D. TEMPLATE	
2000 Chapel Drive, Durham, NC 27708 919-613-5555 (day), 919-286-0000 (evening) jane.template@duke.edu U.S. Citizen	
<hr/>	
Social Security Number:	555-55-5555
Position Desired:	Accountant/Policy Analyst (TL), GG-0501-12/13
Agency:	Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Vacancy Announcement Number:	0249012
Veterans Preference:	None
Federal Eligibility Status:	Program Examiner, GS-1102-12 (1/2001 to 5/2002)

Summary of Qualifications

You may consider adding a Summary of Qualifications or Profile at the top of your resume (under the Header Section) in order to make sure you address all the key words and important parts of your background that relate to the vacancy. The summary or profile also gives you an opportunity to set the tone of the resume and highlight your key experiences and strengths. It can be in paragraph or bullet form. There are lots of examples of Qualifications Summaries in the Federal Resume Guidebook in the Career Services Office. Here's one:

Extensive experience in public relations for both public and private employers. Four years of marketing development for a Fortune 500 company. Assisted in the public relations for a successful Congressional campaign. Strong background with grant and proposal writing for nonprofit funding.

- Outstanding written and oral communication skills.
- Strong background in analytical research.
- Extensive experience in a variety of computer applications.
- Excellent interpersonal and group presentation skills.
- Effective ability to work independently and as a team member on group projects.

Education Section

- You can use most of the information directly from your traditional resume.
- List all your education and degrees in reverse chronological order, including high school.
- If you have lots more experience than education, you can put this section lower in the resume.
- Be sure to include continuing education and training, but separate it from your university degrees. Create a separate section or subsection for Continuing Education or Job-Related Training.
- Include the name of the institution, the city, state, and zip code, dates of attendance and degrees earned. Do not send a transcript unless one is requested.

Experience Section

- You can use most of the information directly from your traditional resume.
- Make sure you read the vacancy announcement carefully and use key words from the vacancy announcement in your descriptions of previous positions whenever possible. Human resources staff members, who may not know very much about the specific duties of the position, will do the initial screening of resumes, so make sure it's easy for them to see that you're qualified by including key words and skills that match the vacancy announcement. Also make the resume as positive as possible, as the HR office will want to make sure you're a person they will want to interact with on a regular basis.

- Be sure to include the full address of each employer, with zip code, along with the name, phone number and email (if applicable) of your supervisor, dates of service, and salary information. Also note whether or not your supervisor may be contacted.
- You will be able to relate your specific experience to the needs of the position in the KSA narratives later, so don't worry about making these descriptions fit the position exactly. The descriptions you use in your traditional resume are probably just fine.
- As you write or edit the descriptions of previous positions, make sure you cover these areas:
 - Knowledge required for the position
 - Degree of independence or supervision you had
 - Degree to which you made independent judgments and decisions rather than using a manual
 - Quantifiable measures of the scope of your work, for example, the amount of the budget you controlled
 - Specific projects or accomplishments
 - Honors and awards received

Honors and Awards

Honors and awards are important items that set you apart from other applicants. If you want to include both professional honors and academic honors, make a separate section titled Honors and Awards and list them in that section. If you only have recognition in one place or the other, put them with the specific job or educational experience.

Leadership and Service

Volunteer experience is important, and if you plan to include these experiences in your KSA's (described below), you should list them on your federal resume. Volunteer leadership roles are particularly important as a way to show your ability to work with a team. You can list these items simply or include a line about your actual duties or accomplishments if they are significant. Here's an example:

Volunteer Tutor, E.K. Powe Elementary School, Durham, NC, 1999-2002
 Worked with two students each year who were in danger of being retained. All six were promoted to middle school. Raised \$5,000 for computer equipment and teaching materials for tutoring room.

Other Qualifications and Skills

At the end, this can be a "catch-all" section for things that don't really fit into the other sections. Depending on the nature of the position you seek, you will want to include any publications, presentations at conferences, public speaking appearances on TV or radio, memberships or affiliations in professional associations, certifications, and licenses. Include dates but do not send documentation unless requested. This section is also the place for foreign language proficiency, computer skills, and any other special qualifications that might relate to the job, like extensive travel. You can list these without much explanation.

References

Don't list your references on your resume. The interviewer will ask for references when they need them. Don't put "References Available Upon Request." The interviewer knows that already.

The Application Process

First, make sure you are qualified to apply. Look carefully at the first sections of the vacancy announcement. Is the position limited to current or displaced federal employees, or veterans? Are there other qualification requirements that eliminate you from consideration?

If you determine that you are qualified to apply for the position, then look at the Selective Placement Factors (if there are any) and the Evaluation Factors (Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities) to see if your qualifications fit the job. You must write a narrative statement responding to each one of the rating factors listed in the vacancy announcement. Thoughtful KSA's with a strong resume will get you the interview you need to land the federal job you want!

Writing the KSA's

Each vacancy announcement has a set of 3-6 criteria by which your application will be evaluated, commonly called KSA's, for knowledge, skills and abilities. You must prepare a narrative statement describing how your education, work experience, or other experience relates to each criterion. You prepare your KSA narratives on separate sheets of paper, usually only one page and no more than one and one-half pages. The goal of the KSA statement is to tie your experiences to the qualifications for the specific job. Readers want specific examples that are concise and informative. If your KSA statement is written well, the reader will not have to look through your resume to see if you have experiences that relate to the skills they need.

Here are some examples of actual KSA factors from federal vacancy announcements:

- The ability to apply analytical methods and techniques to identify and resolve complex financial issues.
- Ability to perform in-depth analysis of data at national and regional levels to provide inputs for reports and other research projects as well as the development of policies and programs.
- Knowledge of research literature on the nonprofit sector, civil society, and volunteerism.
- Highly developed interpersonal skills to represent the Department to external organizations.
- Skill in analyzing, interpreting and applying complex legislation, regulatory decisions and policies.
- Demonstrated skill in presenting information, ideas and advice in a clear, concise and logical manner, both orally and in writing.

In responding to these factors, you get the opportunity to tell your unique story, giving examples of your individual characteristics and experiences. You can describe in greater detail the challenges you met in particular situations and give your concise federal resume some additional context.

Call upon all your experiences in your narrative responses. Think about each position you held, volunteer experiences, family crises, team projects in graduate school. When you refer to specific accomplishments, always include the specific position you held and the time frame when the activity occurred. Be specific, and use facts, but also make it interesting and lively. Use action verbs and frame the KSA in narrative first person, one of the few times when it's okay to use "I".

Don't make the KSA statements into generic responses that just reiterate items from your resume. HR staff read lots of KSA's, so you need to stand out with your specific and unique examples. One recommended method of organizing your KSA's is the "CCAR" model, which stands for Context, Challenge, Action and Results. **Context** describes the factors that contributed to a particular challenge, such as budget cuts, new legislation or staff reorganization. **Challenge** describes the specific problem that you had to address. **Action** describes the steps you took to solve the problem. **Results** are outcomes.

Rather than talking generically about your regular presentations at Senior Staff meetings, talk about a specific incident where you were challenged and had to think on your feet to get the results you wanted. Here's an example of a great KSA that followed the CCAR model from The Resume Place (web site I mentioned above)—I note each of the four parts of the CCAR model:

"In January 1996 following the notification that SAMHSA would receive a dramatically reduced budget (*the Context*), I recognized that important programs would be discontinued, including a much needed drug-abuse program for the Kickapoo Reservation Indians in the State of Texas (*the Challenge*). As the federal program manager, I took the initiative to communicate the situation with the State of Texas to turn over funding to the State (*the Action*). I traveled to Texas on several occasions to negotiate directly with the State of Texas project officer to ensure that the State appreciated the severity of the situation and the change in federal funding. I prepared a briefing booklet for state representatives giving them the data on the 1,300 eligible adults on the reservation and the fact that two-thirds of the total population participated in the program. *Results*: I successfully achieved a cooperative agreement with the State with commitments of \$500,000 per year. I also discovered an additional \$400,000 from carryover from the previous year. Additionally, I brought in four other state agencies to assist with service provision and additional funding and support."

You can use one good example, as above, or several examples to demonstrate your experience in a particular area. Try to use recent examples, within 5 years. Tried to use different examples for each KSA, but if the example is significant, you can emphasize different skills in the same experience. Use examples from both paid and unpaid experiences. Also include quotes from satisfied customers or supervisors, awards, training, and other relevant information.