

11

What are the encore career opportunities in government?

As the country's single largest employer, the federal government offers jobs across the country and across vocations, from landscaper to laboratory scientist.

Look out for more "help wanted" signs in the near future. Max Stier, president of the Partnership for Public Service and an expert in federal hiring trends, predicts that the federal government will hire 600,000 people over the next four years. And the U.S. Office of Personnel Management estimates that 37 percent of the government's full-time work force will retire by 2016.

Available jobs run from entry-level to senior positions in "key areas where the government has a real need for talent and are vital for the agencies' running," says Leslie Ann Pearson,

senior program manager at the Partnership and head of its FedExperience program, which aims to help the government attract highly qualified boomers.

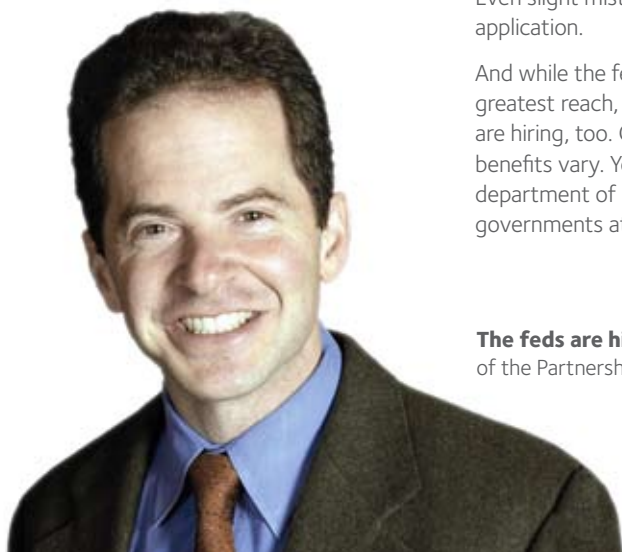
More people of all ages are seeking federal jobs, some inspired by President Obama's call to service and others by an interest in stable jobs with good benefits. Base salaries average \$43,900 on the low end and \$56,900 on the high end. Benefits include health, dental, vision, life, and long-term care insurance.

The application process for federal jobs can be an obstacle, acknowledges Pearson. Though applications vary across agencies, they contain multiple parts and can take hours to complete.

It's crucial to research the procedures to improve your chances, Pearson says. Even slight mistakes can disqualify your application.

And while the federal government has the greatest reach, state and local governments are hiring, too. Opportunities, pay, and benefits vary. You can find your state department of labor and links to local governments at statelocalgov.net.

The feds are hiring, says Max Stier of the Partnership for Public Service.



957,000

Number of federal employees who will be eligible to retire by September 30, 2016.

U.S. Office of Personnel Management

PRACTICAL TIPS

The federal job application

Ten tips for filling out a federal job application, from usajobs.gov, the official government job site:



- 1. Use words wisely.** Write in an easy, readable style.
- 2. Keep sentences clear.** Short, direct sentences get to the point.
- 3. Make your message stand out.** Keep your paragraphs brief, usually between five and 10 lines.
- 4. Focus on outcomes.** Discuss the whats, hows, and breadth of your experiences.
- 5. Showcase your role.** Did you work on your own? As part of a team? As a supervisor?
- 6. Remember, time frames count.** What were the dates or length of time you worked on a project or job?
- 7. Highlight the value of all your experience.** You may have gained valuable skills through leadership positions, volunteer work, and other activities.
- 8. Show and tell.** Telling about your experience is great, but use examples, too.
- 9. Resist additions.** Don't send copies of awards, publications, training certificates, letters of recommendation, writing samples, or photos unless the agency specifically asks.
- 10. Don't repeat your resume.** Spotlight important facts or give examples that expand on your resume.

PROFILE Sharon Ridings



Sharon Ridings took a gamble.

She forged her career path from banking to the bright lights of the gaming industry. But she left corporate life to join the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, where she is in charge of training and leadership development.

Ridings' husband, already a government worker, suggested that she look into a federal job, but a good friend told her she was too old. "I love a challenge, so I went for it anyway," Ridings says. "I don't like when people tell me that I can't."

The application process astounded her: "I'd never seen anything like that before. I tried to cut it down to its simplest components. I answered the questions exactly how they were asked."

Months passed before Ridings got two job offers on the same day, one from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the other from the EPA. She says she took the EPA job because it was more challenging and she identified with its mission, though she had to start at a more junior level than her previous position.

Ridings, now 53, says her previous experience served her well when she started at the EPA in 2000. And now, she feels like she's helping to further a worthy cause: "The training that I do is very critical to the agency's work."

"I don't like when people tell me that I can't."

SHARON RIDINGS

INSIDER KNOWLEDGE

Joining the public work force

Career changers have unique concerns coming into the federal government. The Federal Citizen Information Center offers these suggestions:

Estimate your pay level. The federal government classifies positions according to the complexity of duties and responsibility level. People qualify for a given level (or "GS," for "general schedule") based on education, experience, or a combination. help.usajobs.gov/jobseeker/faq (What is my grade?)

Understand job requirements. Vacancy announcements often say that a worker needs experience equivalent to a particular GS grade. A vacancy announcement at the GS-12 level might require a year of experience at the GS-11 stage. If the work described in the job announcement is only slightly more complex or responsible than your past work, you might be eligible.

Be flexible about titles. If you want to be a manager or supervisor, don't limit yourself to openings with those words in the job title. Jobs with widely varying levels of responsibility are often listed under the same title.

Explain past job titles and experience. Use titles that clearly describe what you did and be specific about your experience. You may want to put the equivalent federal titles in parentheses.

Consider the Senior Executive Service. If you have substantial experience in high-level leadership positions, you might qualify for a job helping to lead the federal civilian work force. opm.gov/ses



INFORMATION

Essential resources

- **FedJobs' List of Federal Job Fairs**
fedjobs.com/chat/jobfairs.html
- **Senior Environmental Employment Program**
seeprogram.org
- **Work for America, from CareerBuilder.com**
workforamerica.com
- **The Everything Guide to Government Jobs: A Complete Handbook to Hundreds of Lucrative Opportunities across the Nation** James Mannion
- **Ten Steps to a Federal Job: How to Land a Job in the Obama Administration** Kathryn Troutman
- **How to Land a Top-Paying Federal Job: Your Complete Guide to Opportunities, Internships, Resumes and Cover Letters, Application Essays (KSAs), Interviews, Salaries, Promotions and More!** Lily Whiteman

429,000

Number of federal workers 55 and older.

Partnership for Public Service