JOB SEARCH

Through your research and networking, you should have a solid idea of where you need to be searching for opportunities in your industry. This section will build on what you learned in the previous sections, and provide tips as you embark on your job/internship search.

You will learn...

- How to identify employers/positions.
- More about online resources for job searching.
- About the process for applying for federal jobs.
The Job Search is Step 4 in the four-step process.

**STEP 4: SEARCH**
- Explore options and identify prospective sites and contacts using HireMason and web resources.

**Identifying Employers and Positions**
You created your resume and cover letter and had them critiqued. You identified certain fields of interest and researched the industry. You networked using social media and at events. Now is the time to search and apply! Make sure you cover all your bases when searching:
  - Through your networks
  - Industry-specific databases or listservs
  - Social media platforms (particularly popular for certain industries and growing in popularity for many others)
  - Individual company websites
  - General databases

**RESEARCHING EMPLOYERS**
Every field is unique and it’s critical for you to learn the specific databases, listservs, or methods of sharing open positions that are typically used. Target social media platforms or job boards that are specific to your professional goals such as those found through professional associations. Use the information provided in the “Research” section to target employers.

**THE “OPEN” JOB MARKET**
The open job market means anything that is advertised or published. These include all jobs in HireMason, newspaper classified ads, employer job listings, placement agencies, ads in trade journals, job and career fairs, and job newsletters. This open job market should be the first thing that you tackle when looking for a job. Become familiar with the resources that have the kinds of jobs that you are interested in applying to, and make it a habit to frequent these sources.

**THE “HIDDEN” JOB MARKET**
Most jobs, as many as 85 percent, are not advertised. While it takes more time and energy to uncover these opportunities, it has a much larger rate of success. Finding jobs in the “hidden” job market often involves networking. In the end, you will often find yourself with less competition than an advertised job, and better chance of obtaining an interview.

**Job Search Resources**
Below are a few key resources you should keep in mind when conducting your search:

**YOUR NETWORK**
Approximately 70 percent of opportunities are found through networking. Remember to conduct informational interviews (refer to the Networking section for more information) to learn:
  - More about your industry, company, career paths, and types of opportunities
  - Never ask for a job or internship; instead ask for advice
  - Build relationships and take a genuine interest in others

**MASON CAREER SERVICES RESOURCES**
- Mason Career Services website (tips, advice, and more): [careers.gmu.edu](http://careers.gmu.edu)
- HireMason
- Check out our industry-specific resources on our “Industry Resources” page: [careers.gmu.edu/industries](http://careers.gmu.edu/industries)
- On-Campus Interviewing: Interview on campus with employers for full-time positions and internships

**INDUSTRY-SPECIFIC DATABASES**
- Target industry-specific internship/job boards or listservs through national or regional associations related to your industry. (You should have compiled this list through your research and networking.)
- Check out our industry resources page for more information: [careers.gmu.edu/industries](http://careers.gmu.edu/industries)

**SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS**
- LinkedIn: [www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com)
- Twitter: [www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com)
- Facebook: [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)

**INDIVIDUAL COMPANY WEBSITES**
- Through your research and networking, you should have determined some target companies that peak your interest
• Regularly check the “careers” section of company websites to ensure you’re capturing any and all opportunities that may be posted (NOT all companies will post to a general database)

**GENERAL DATABASES**

- HireMason: gmu-csm.symplicity.com/students
- Internships.com: www.internships.com
- Idealist: www.idealist.com
- USAJobs (for government positions): www.usajobs.gov
- Indeed: www.indeed.com
- Simply Hired: www.simplyhired.com
- Career Builder: www.careerbuilder.com
- Monster: www.monster.com
- Craigslist: www.craigslist.com
- DICE: www.dice.com (for technology positions)

**Federal Government Jobs**

The federal government is a major employer in the Washington, D.C., area, offering a wide variety of employment and internship opportunities for all college majors. With more than two million civilian employees nationwide—and attractive benefits—the federal government is the employer of choice for many Mason students. Moreover, federal internships offer students an opportunity to gain professional experience that can lead to full-time federal employment after graduation.

**MANAGING THE FEDERAL JOB SEARCH**

To manage a federal job search, you should treat the more than 250 federal departments, agencies, and bureaus as if they were separate organizations.

**IDENTIFY FEDERAL POSITIONS**

**THAT MATCH YOUR MAJOR AND QUALIFICATIONS**

Start by perusing www.usajobs.gov to get a feel for the opportunities available. Determine the names of positions, their four-digit job series number, agencies, and departments of interest. Decide which agency is right for you by considering the location, the mission, and the services provided.

- It helps to focus on two or three particular agencies to become familiar with their hiring process and the agency mission.

- Remember not to make your job search too narrow. Prepare as many applications as you can and keep applying. For instance, if you want a job as a writer, do not apply only for positions named “writer.” Look also under the liberal arts occupational interest area to uncover additional position titles (such as program analyst) because writing is a major skill used in many positions.

**FOLLOW HIRING PROCEDURES**

Federal positions generally are filled on the basis of education, work experience, and special qualifications. Agencies occasionally will direct hire employees when there is a need to fill a position quickly, and may list positions and policies on their own website’s career pages.

**Internships** are not part of the competitive service and may not require the same extensive application procedures or timeline as the competitive service. Internship opportunities can be found at www.usajobs/studentjobs.

**HOW TO APPLY**

Although most U.S. government agencies will now accept a simple resume, you can make yourself more competitive by completing the longer federal resume. Please see the “Resume/Cover Letter Section” for tips on writing a federal resume and samples.

The cardinal rule for applying is to accurately follow the application instructions in the job vacancy announcement!

**KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, AND ABILITIES (KSAS)**

**Writing your KSAs**

Many federal agencies still require applicants to write KSAs as part of the application. The best predictor of future performance is past performance in similar situations. KSAs draw on your past experiences, education and/or training that prove you can do the job better than others in the candidate pool. Include KSAs from vacancy announcement on your federal resume!

**Completing KSAs**

- Identify your major accomplishments as they relate to the KSAs required for the position for which you are applying.
- Draw on your past experience, education, or training that demonstrates you possess the particular KSA.
- Provide a detailed response to each KSA.
- Address each KSA listed separately. Do not combine KSAs and give one answer.
- Include a detailed narrative highlighting your past experience, education, and/or training, which further justifies that you meet the specific requirements for the position.
- In order to be considered for any government position requiring KSAs, each KSA must be answered.

Include answers to the following (indicate specific and detailed descriptions of your work experiences):

- An estimate of when the experience(s) was acquired
- A description of the problem(s) you faced or the objective(s) you were trying to accomplish
- A specific statement of what you actually did
- A description of the outcome or results of the activity
- The name and telephone number of someone who can verify the information you provided. This doesn’t have to be a supervisor.

**FOLLOW-UP**

Federal agencies are required to notify applicants of the status of their applications. If you have not heard anything or received an acknowledgement of your application within two weeks after applying, call or e-mail the agency contact. Some agencies have
automated application tracking systems, which allow applicants to check their own application status.

Patience, Persistence, and Networking
The federal government is currently averaging 3 to 4 months to process applicants from the initial resume submission to a Conditional Offer of Employment (COE) for full-time career positions. Do not lose heart! Students applying for internships and other student programs have an advantage because the application process is much shorter.

Network with everyone you know who has some connection with the federal government—friends, relatives, neighbors, professors, and others. Conduct information interviews with federal workers to find out hiring trends, identify upcoming needs, and obtain feedback on your qualifications. Start early and network, network, network!

Background Investigations and Security Clearances
Background investigations and security clearances determine an applicant’s trustworthiness and reliability before granting him or her access to sensitive information. Only the federal government can grant people “clearances” for work purposes through a background investigation and/or an in-depth security clearance process. To get a clearance, the applicant must be sponsored by or have a job offer from a government agency or contractor and must be conducting business that justifies granting him or her access to sensitive information. All federal job offers are contingent on a clearance and are withdrawn if the candidate does not receive the clearance required by the organization for the specific position.

Types of Investigations
- SF 85, nonsensitive background investigation
- SF 85p, public trust background investigation
- SF 86, national security clearance

These are available on the Office of Personnel Management’s website (www.opm.gov/forms). Maintaining a career diary to record all facts of prior and current employment, education, residences, and domestic and overseas travel will be useful in clearance actions.

It is critical to be absolutely truthful on clearance forms, in interviews with investigators, and on polygraphs. Situations not explained or described untruthfully will end the process, whereas truthfulness and explanations of some behaviors may be considered and the process can go forward. If the process is curtailed, the candidate is not likely to receive an explanation. Agencies are not required to provide explanations; however, candidates may appeal the decisions and ask for reconsideration.

BACKGROUND INVESTIGATIONS (the lowest level—either nonsensitive or public trust).
These can take as little as a few weeks and will include a National Agency Check with Inquiries (NACI). A NACI will look at five years of the candidate’s employment history, education, and references, and require a personal interview. The public trust investigation also will include a credit check. The paper work for a background investigation will require completion of either form SF 85 (nonsensitive) or SF 85p (public trust).

SECURITY CLEARANCES
Confidential—Provides access to information or material that may cause damage to national security if disclosed without authorization.

Secret—Provides access to information or material that may cause serious damage to national security if disclosed without authorization.

Top Secret—Provides access to information or material that may cause exceptionally grave damage to national security if disclosed without authorization.

Top Secret/Sensitive Compartmented Information—Provides access to all intelligence information and material that require special controls for restricted handling within compartmented channels and for which compartmentalization is established.

The paperwork for a security clearance will include federal form SF-86 (National Security Questionnaire) and other supporting documents. Your signature on these documents will allow the agency to check your medical history, credit and financial history, military background, police record, and other areas of your life. Make sure you understand the process before applying. This process is an in-depth probe into your personal and professional life. With the threat of spies, terrorism, and other issues of national security, the level of scrutiny will be intense.

Interim security clearances may be obtained in 26 to 45 days. Interns sometimes receive interim clearances and their access to sensitive material is restricted. The amount of time to obtain a security clearance can be 9 to 12 months—or more!

Security clearances obtained in previous employment usually can be reactivated within a 24-month period following the end of employment in which the clearance was obtained. If the candidate had a clearance more than 24 months in the past, the process of obtaining a clearance must start over again.

The federal agencies that can provide a security clearance include all national security and intelligence-gathering agencies (CIA, National Security Agency), federal law enforcement agencies (FBI, Secret Service, Drug Enforcement Agency, Naval Criminal Investigative Service), civilian military agencies (Defense Intelligence Agency, Defense Security Service), certain occupations in the U.S. military, diplomatic agencies (State Department), certain government scientific agencies, and a number of others depending on their mission and role in national security.

THE SECURITY CLEARANCE INVESTIGATION
The investigation focuses on an individual’s character and conduct, emphasizing such factors as honesty, trustworthiness, reliability, financial responsibility, criminal activity, emotional stability, and other similar and pertinent areas. All investigations consist of checks of national records and credit checks. Some investigations also include interviews with individuals who know the candidate, such as neighbors, current and former coworkers, and family members, as well as the candidate himself or herself.
Factors Pertinent to Background Investigations and Security Clearances

- Alcohol use—excessive, patterns, abuse
- Allegiance to the United States—anything to suggest allegiance to other countries above allegiance to the United States
- Criminal conduct—particularly any felony convictions
- Drug use—patterns of use (frequency and recency), type of drugs
- Emotional and mental stability
- Financial problems—mostly focused on current issues with credit and debts that cannot be repaid
- Foreign influence and preference—including dual citizenship
- Misuse of information technology—music downloads and other copyrighted material are included, and will be questioned in the investigation process as well as in polygraph interviews
- Outside activities—investigators review community and extracurricular activities
- Security violations—while as a federal employee, contractor, or intern
- Sexual behavior—focus is on behavior, not preferences
- Personal conduct—behavior indicating a lack of trustworthiness to protect federal information

Violations of any of these factors may not necessarily prevent clearance, and consideration may be given for activity in the past and extenuating circumstances.

Resources for Your Federal Job Search

The federal government has two categories of employment: competitive service and excepted service. Competitive service jobs constitute some 90 percent of all federal jobs and are managed through the Office of Personnel Management’s (OPM) online system, www.usjobs.gov. Excepted service agencies include all intelligence agencies, the State Department’s Foreign Service Officer track, the Government Accountability Office, the National Science Foundation, and a number of others. Each excepted service agency runs its own hiring process, so students will have to go to individual agency websites to apply. The Intelligence Community has a portal to its agencies at www.intelligence.gov.

Another helpful resource specifically aimed at students is the Partnership for Public Service’s website at www.makingthedifference.org.

The Career Library houses valuable resources for researching agencies and locating contacts for networking. See the Government section (yellow). Several of note include:

- Federal Jobs: The Ultimate Guide
- Guide to America’s Federal Jobs
- The Student’s Federal Career Guide
- Ten Steps to a Federal Job
- The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Getting Government Jobs

You should pay attention to political trends and agency budgets for indicators of job prospects; currently, science, engineering, finance, accounting, IT, procurement, and health care have good opportunities for qualified applicants.

Regularly check the employment pages of agency websites. If you are still a student, apply for student opportunities. Keep networking!