

# Government Careers Handbook

*The United States government is, by far, the nation's largest employer. About two-thirds of federal employees perform white-collar jobs—managers, clerks, engineers, and so on. The remainder are blue-collar workers—painters, heavy equipment operators, mechanics, and electricians, to name just a few. In fact, for nearly every occupation in the private sector, a similar job exists somewhere in the federal government. Fewer than 1 in 10 federal employees works in the Washington, D.C., area. Most blue-collar employees work at naval shipyards, military bases, or on numerous federal construction projects around the country. White-collar federal workers can be found in every city in America.*

## The Federal Job Market



Every government position falls under one of three job systems. Most white-collar jobs are in the General Schedule, or GS for short. This system assigns each job title to 1 of 15 different levels, based on the experience and expertise needed to do the work. Pay for each position is set according to its classification. The base income for all occupations classified GS-7, for example, is identical no matter how different the jobs are.

The following occupations sample the types of jobs available with the federal government. Although all are entry-level positions, they illustrate a range of duties, job opportunities, and background requirements. Ten are General Schedule positions, because this job category comprises the majority of federal positions. Obviously, however, no list like this one can represent the more than 2,000 occupations at which federal employees currently work.

### How to Find Government Jobs and Career Resources on the Net

There are many more careers in the government than the ones listed below. The United States government recruits an average of more than 350,000 new hires each year in hundreds of entry level to professional occupations. Anyone interested in a challenging career with excellent job security and benefits should explore the lucrative government job market.

To locate career resources on the Internet, simply go to a search engine and type in a general topic, such as *government jobs*, *government careers*,

or *federal employment*. You may also wish to look under individual executive departments, such as the Department of State or the Department of Agriculture. To find state or local level government jobs, type in a search topic such as *jobs in California*.

## Budget Analyst



Working under the overall direction of a budget officer, budget analysts are assigned to develop budgetary policy and monitor the financial aspects of specific offices, programs, or activities within the agency that employs them. This responsibility includes making sure that office spending is appropriate and falls within established budgetary guidelines. By analyzing the financial costs and benefits of possible courses of action, budget analysts also help agency managers make policy and operation decisions. In some agencies, budget analysts help determine rates and charges and provide guidance for groups being regulated. Budget analysts work under pressure of tight deadlines and must have highly developed reasoning and communications skills.

**Position Requirements:** In addition to a written test, applicants are scored on the basis of their experience. Three years of general experience is required. That experience should have provided knowledge of financial and management principles and practices as they apply to organizations. There is no formal education requirement, but most budget analysts have college degrees. A four-year degree substitutes for the experience requirement.

Degrees that include courses in logic, math and statistics, economics, computer science, and other courses that teach techniques used in budget analysis earn high ratings for applicants.

**Salary and Outlook:** Although more than 12,000 men and women work in the position, there is a high demand for additional budget analysts. Nearly every government department and agency employs at least one. The starting salary is about \$22,000 per year, but top pay for this job is more than \$100,000.

**State and Local Government Opportunities:** Many large state and local government agencies also employ budget analysts.

## Congressional Aide



Congressional aides perform a variety of roles in the legislative branch. Many staff the special and standing committees of the House and Senate. As attorneys, investigators, researchers, and other specialists, they provide the expertise each committee needs to carry out its work. Other aides serve individual senators and representatives, either in Washington or in their home states and districts. Those on Washington staffs typically work as press aides, administrative assistants, scheduling coordinators, policy specialists, and legislative assistants. Most aides in the home office do “casework,” handling constituents’ requests for assistance.

**Position Requirements:** Because civil service laws do not apply to Congress, there are no fixed requirements for congressional aide, nor is there any set path to employment.

However, aides tend to be young, well-educated, and have backgrounds in social work, economics, law, political science, and other areas related to the work they perform. A large number have previously served Congress as unpaid student interns or on professional fellowships. Because these are patronage jobs, political connections are important. Many new aides have worked in the campaigns of the legislators who hire them. All committees require a set number of Republicans and Democrats on their staffs.

**Salary and Outlook:** Here, too, few standards apply. Each legislator receives a fixed amount for salaries and distributes it as he or she sees fit. Top employees can earn over \$100,000 annually. Congress employs some 15,000 aides, about two-thirds of whom work for individual senators and representatives. Openings are common, as aides move from staff to staff, to positions in the executive branch, or to jobs in the private sector.

**State and Local Government Opportunities:** City councils and state legislatures typically employ a small number of aides.

**Congressional staff members assist members of Congress with legislative duties.**



### Air Traffic Controller



Air traffic controllers are responsible for overall safety on commercial flights.

Most work in airport control towers, where they make sure that arriving and departing aircraft do not collide by giving pilots taxiing and takeoff instructions and clearances to land. Other air traffic controllers work at en route centers. These controllers use radar to track planes in the air, advising pilots about flight conditions and giving course and altitude instructions when other aircraft are in the area. At flight service centers, a third type of air traffic controller provides pilots with data about terrain, weather conditions, and other information critical to flight safety.

**Position Requirements:** A college degree, or three years of general work experience, or a combination of college and experience totaling three years is usually required. However, you can also qualify if you have a pilot's license and 350 hours

of flight time, an instrument flight rating, or a variety of other experiences with military or civilian aircraft. All candidates must pass a written test, a medical and psychological examination, a drug screen, and a background check. For most positions, your vision must also be corrected to 20/20. Candidates who meet these requirements enter a 16-week training program. Only about half the trainees successfully complete this school.

**Salary and Outlook:** The Federal Aviation Administration employs about 26,000 air traffic controllers. New positions are often available as the agency increases the size of the air traffic system. Pay begins at about \$36,000 a year but controllers who work at the busiest facilities earn higher pay. Average pay for the job is about \$50,100 annually.

**State and Local Government Opportunities:** Few related jobs exist at other levels of government.

#### Air traffic controller



## Correctional Officer



Correctional officers supervise and ensure the custody of criminals in the federal prison system. They are also responsible for guiding prisoner conduct, directing work details, carrying out plans to modify the behavior and attitudes of inmates, and counseling inmates about personal and prison problems. Some correctional officers carry firearms and all are required to complete firearms training. Duties of correctional officers may involve long periods of walking and standing, restraint of prisoners in emergencies, and other physical exertion. The nature of the job may also cause a large amount of mental stress. Successful correctional officers are likely to be flexible, unbiased, understanding, observant, resourceful, stable, and mature.

**Position Requirements:** Applicants should have at least 3.5 years of general work experience in such areas as rehabilitation counseling, employment counseling, teaching, sales, or in a variety of a community and social services. Any post-high school education may take the place of some work experience, and a college degree with additional course work related to law enforcement can substitute for all of it. While there are no specific height and weight requirements for these positions, applicants must meet a number of other physical standards.

**Salary and Outlook:** Although there are only about 6,300 correctional officers serving the federal government, the Bureau of Prisons is the fastest growing federal agency. In addition, many current officers move on to other jobs in the prison system. Beginning annual salary is between \$21,380 and \$23,900, but correctional officers enjoy a faster promotion rate than do other federal employees. The annual average salary for correctional officers is \$37,900.

### State and Local Government Opportunities:

State prison systems also employ correctional officers. So do city and county jails, although their guards may not have that title. The growth of the prison population has increased job opportunities.



**Environmental protection specialist**

## Environmental Protection Specialist



Environmental protection specialists are responsible for monitoring all activities that affect the nation's air, water, and land resources to assure compliance with federal environmental protection laws. Those who are employed by the Environmental Protection Agency primarily evaluate compliance by state and local governments and by private industry. Environmental protection specialists who work for other federal agencies monitor their agency's compliance. Their work involves reviewing agency policies and procedures, helping to develop new agency procedures and techniques when necessary, and making recommendations for further research. Environment protection specialists also provide technical assistance and guidance on environmental laws, regulations, and programs to all private-sector groups that their agency regulates.



**Position Requirements:** Basic requirements for trainees are a bachelor's degree in any field or three years of relevant work experience, or a combination of education and experience. Nontraining entry-level positions require an additional year's graduate study in an appropriate scientific field, a year of highly specialized experience that is directly related to the job, or a combination that adds up to a year. No written test is required. Applicants are ranked by the quality of their education and experience.

**Salary and Outlook:** About 2,600 environmental protection specialists work at a number of federal agencies, but most are employed by the Environmental Protection Agency. Environmental protection specialists earn between \$26,470 and \$85,780.

**State and Local Government Opportunities:** Largely because of strict and comprehensive federal laws regarding the environment, a need for these positions exists at every level of government.

### Food Inspector



Food inspectors assure that the nation's meat supply complies with federal laws governing the wholesomeness and purity of products sold for human consumption. Although they are government employees, food inspectors work in privately owned slaughterhouses and processing plants. Some examine animals before and after slaughter to make sure they are not contaminated and that sanitary procedures are followed. Other food inspectors inspect ingredients that go into processed food, such as canned goods and frozen dinners. Food inspectors often work near machinery in noisy and hazardous environments. Their duties can involve using sharp knives, lifting heavy objects, repeating motions, and working with their hands in water. They must stand for long periods of time, and sometimes must walk on catwalks and slippery floors.

**Position Requirements:** The qualifications for food inspectors are based on education or experi-

ence. To meet the education requirement you should have a college degree in biology, chemistry, zoology, veterinary medicine, food technology, or some appropriate agricultural field. With no degree, you must have three years of relevant experience. This could include work in a stockyard, slaughterhouse or processing plant, on a ranch or farm, or as a veterinary assistant. Applicants must pass a written test and a rigorous physical examination.

**Salary and Outlook:** The Department of Agriculture employs about 6,200 food inspectors. Most openings are in California, Kansas, Massachusetts, Nebraska, New York, and North Carolina. Starting pay is between \$21,370 and \$26,470 a year.

**State and Local Government Opportunities:** State and local health departments and state agriculture departments have similar positions to assure that food products are safe and hygienically prepared.

### Foreign Service Officer



Foreign Service Officers work at a variety of jobs at about 250 United States diplomatic posts around the world and in Washington, D.C. Administrative officers coordinate the daily operations of an embassy or consulate. Economics officers analyze economic trends in the host country and promote United States economic interests and policies. Political officers advise, consult, and negotiate with foreign government officials and keep Washington advised of political developments in their host country. Information officers serve as spokespersons, handling all inquiries about the United States and its policies. Consular officers assist Americans who are living or visiting abroad and issue visas to persons wanting to enter the United States. Most new Foreign Service Officers start in this position.

**Position Requirements:** Although there is no formal education requirement, most Foreign Service Officers have graduate degrees. Applicants

must take the difficult Foreign Service Exam. To do well, you should possess excellent writing abilities and a thorough knowledge of government, economics, geography, United States and world history, current events, and world cultures. If you pass the test, you will be invited to a daylong interview that includes two more written tests and an oral exam. New hires spend five years on probation and must master a foreign language.

**Salary and Outlook:** The Department of State and the United States Information Agency employ Foreign Service Officers. The positions are highly sought. Only a fraction of some 20,000 persons who take the test are hired each year. The beginning salary ranges from \$29,900 to \$49,100, depending on education, work experience, and foreign language skills. Promotions are competitive.

**State and Local Government Opportunities:** No similar jobs exist at other levels of government.

## Postal Clerk/Carrier



Most postal clerks process mail for delivery, using a complicated system that they must memorize. Others sell stamps, weigh packages and perform related customer services. However, senior employees usually hold these “window clerk” positions. Clerks work indoors and may have to stand for long periods of time. Carriers work outdoors collecting and delivering local mail in all kinds of weather. Some carriers drive their assigned route and others walk, carrying mailbags weighing up to 35 pounds. The duties of new clerks and carriers are often interchangeable. Both have to handle sacks of mail that weigh as much as 70 pounds.

**Position Requirements:** All Americans are eligible to work as postal clerks and carriers. There

is no formal education or experience requirement. Applicants must pass a written test and a physical exam, and must meet vision and hearing requirements. (The hearing requirement may be waived for some clerk positions.) Applicants for positions in which driving is required must possess a driver’s license from the state where the post office is located. They must have a safe driving record and pass a road test to prove they can operate the type of vehicle they will use on the job.



National Park Service badge

**Salary and Outlook:** Postal clerks and carriers are hired by local post offices, according to their needs. Salaries start at about \$25,350 per year and can go higher than \$39,000. Job opportunities are expected to expand as the volume of mail increases with United States business and population growth. However, the increased use of computerized equipment is gradually changing the sorting clerk job into one of machine operator.

**State and Local Government Opportunities:** Many

large state and local government agencies have mailrooms, which employ mail processing clerks and interoffice delivery personnel.

## Park Ranger



Park rangers perform a variety of jobs at national parks, national historical sites, national forests, and on other federal recreational lands. Typical responsibilities include enforcing federal laws and park regulations, providing information, and guiding tours. Firefighting, search and rescue operations, and providing wilderness medical care are also important functions of the position. Park rangers routinely patrol assigned regions in vehicles or on foot to guard against fires and to protect visitors from unsafe conditions. They sometimes must work in extreme temperatures and other harsh weather.

Their duties often require physical exertion in rugged terrain. Rangers may have to be alone on roads or trails for hours, in remote areas and hazardous environments, far from help in event of an emergency.

**Position Requirements:** The basic qualification for a park ranger is six months of general work experience or one year of college. However, most rangers are hired at an advanced pay grade that requires a bachelor's degree in a field appropriate to the job, or two years of job-related work experience, or a combination of education and experience. There is no written test for any level of ranger position.

**Salary and Outlook:** Most rangers—more than 12,000—work for the National Park Service and the United States Forest Service. Some part-time jobs are available during the tourist season. The Bureau of Land Management and the Army Corps of Engineers also hire park rangers. Entry-level salaries for rangers are between \$21,370 and \$32,380. Top pay for a District Ranger is more than \$72,500.

**State and Local Government Opportunities:** State parks and departments of natural resources, local parks and recreation departments, and historical sites operated by state and local governments also hire rangers.

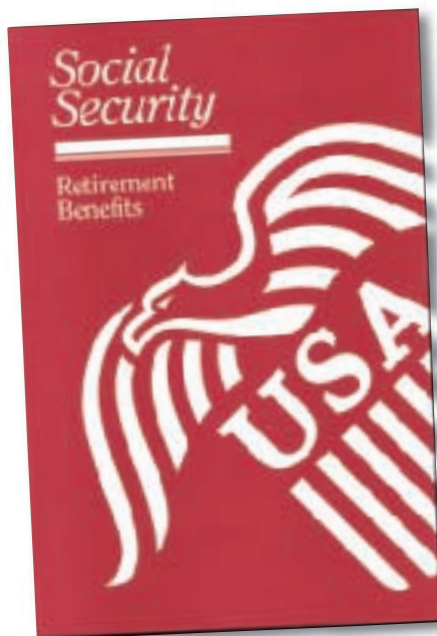
### Claim Authorizer / Service Representative



Claims authorizers and service representatives work at the Social Security Administration's 1,300 offices nationwide.

Claims authorizers decide who should receive

Social Security benefits and how much their benefit should be. Social Security benefits are paid when workers retire or become disabled, on the death of a spouse, or in a number of other circumstances. Regulations for determining eligibility and the amount of the benefit can be complex. Service representatives provide information and help people with benefit-related problems. These can include eligibility questions; lost, late, or incorrect checks; and similar matters. Some service representatives provide help in person at Social Security Administration offices. Others are teleservice representatives, who help people over the phone.



**Social insurance administrators distribute information and answer questions.**

### Position Requirements:

Because the duties of these positions are so agency-specific, few outside jobs provide the required related work experience. However, applicants can qualify if they possess a bachelor's degree and pass a written test. The test is waived for graduates whose overall college grade average was at least 3.5 on a 4-point scale.

### Salary and Outlook:

The government employs nearly 20,000 claims authorizers and 14,000 service repre-

sentatives. The need for workers in both positions is great. Related claims examining opportunities also exist at the Department of Veterans Affairs and in a few other government agencies. Service representatives initially earn between \$19,100 and \$21,370 a year and claims authorizers earn between \$21,370 and \$26,470 to start.

### State and Local Government Opportunities:

Similar claims examining and service positions exist in state and local human services departments, at state bureaus of workers' compensation, and at state unemployment offices.

## Social Worker



Social workers provide helping services as employees of a number of government agencies that work directly with people. Their specific duties may range from carrying out rehabilitation programs for inmates in federal correctional institutions, to counseling patients in government hospitals and clinics or helping families involved in a wide variety of government social welfare programs. Social workers may work with individual clients or with groups. Some help entire communities to develop strategies and resources to prevent or reduce social problems. Others work with adoption programs for children, foster family care, home care services for ill or disabled people, help for mentally disabled or emotionally disturbed clients, and similar professional human service activities.

**Position Requirements:** While some opportunities exist for those with only undergraduate degrees, the basic requirement for the vast majority of applicants is a master's degree in social work. No written test is required, but many specialized positions require relevant experience in addition to education. Generally, social work performed before earning a master's degree does not meet this requirement. Applicants who have not practiced social work for 10 years or more since earning their degree may be asked to provide evidence that their qualifications meet the standards of current social work practice.

**Salary and Outlook:** The average pay for social workers is about \$52,000 annually. Because of the nature and structure of social work, opportunities exist for supervisors, consultants, and program-development specialists. Generally, additional specialized experience is required to qualify for the upper-level positions.

### State and Local Government Opportunities:

Most state and local corrections, health, human services, and social welfare agencies also hire social workers.

## Treasury Enforcement Agent



Treasury enforcement agents work for the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (BATF), the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), and the United States Customs Service. Although they may conduct noncriminal investigations, the majority of their work involves looking into suspected criminal violations of federal tax laws. Most investigations center on laws related to income tax, money laundering, bootleg tobacco and alcohol products, gambling, and gaming devices. BATF agents investigate violations of federal explosives laws and suspected illegal sales or possession of firearms. Customs agents enforce laws to prevent smuggling of goods across U.S. borders. Agents prepare detailed reports of their investigations, make recommendations about the prosecution of violators, and assist United States Attorneys in preparing cases and during trials. Most Treasury enforcement agents carry firearms and are required to be experts in their use.

**Position Requirements:** Applicants should have three years of accounting and other related experience, such as in commercial auditing, financial management or business law. However, college courses in accounting and related business or law subjects may be substituted for some or all of this requirement. A year of criminal investigations work, including experience in evidence gathering and in a variety of investigative techniques, is also required. Because of the nature of the job, applicants should be in top physical condition. In addition, they must pass the Treasury Enforcement Agent Exam.

**Salary and Outlook:** The Department of the Treasury employs about 15,000 enforcement agents—about two-thirds of them as special agents at the IRS. Competition for the positions is intense. Beginning salaries range from \$26,880 to \$48,250 per year. Experienced special agents can earn up to \$72,600.

### State and Local Government Opportunities:

Some state liquor departments and departments of taxation also hire enforcement agents.