

YOUR QUESTIONS, ANSWERED

THE SERVICE
TEAM PRESENTS:

THE NSEP SERVICE
GUIDEBOOK





WHAT'S NEXT?

Now that you've completed your National Security Education Program language study, it's time to start thinking about how you plan on making use of your federal service opportunity.

All NSEP awardees sign a Service Agreement stating that they will work in a national security position for a certain period of time after they complete their NSEP-funded program. We have developed this how-to guidebook to help you understand the options available to you and to assist you in successfully completing your service requirement.

This guidebook aims to answer frequently asked questions about the service requirement, as well as to provide you with career building resources. As such, it will cover qualifying jobs, deadlines, NSEPnet, hiring authorities, important vocabulary, and much more! If you have any questions or concerns that aren't covered inside, you can contact our office at nsep@nsep.gov for help.

We look forward to working with you. Happy job searching!

Sincerely,
The NSEP Service Team



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1. Qualifying Jobs and Service Credit

As an award recipient who received your NSEP scholarship or fellowship in 2008 or later, the terms and conditions of your award stipulate that your search for jobs in fulfillment of your service opportunity take place in three tiers. These are:

Tier One (the four priority agencies):

Department of War (including all elements of the U.S. Armed Forces)
Department of State
Department of Homeland Security
Intelligence Community

Tier Two:

Federal positions with national security responsibilities in any agency outside of Tier One

Tier Three:

Positions with U.S.-based educational institutions related to your NSEP funded study

While receipt of an NSEP award does not guarantee federal employment, NSEP staff will support you in your search. There are many ways to fulfill the requirement, and upon completion of your program, you will be well-equipped to find important and career-enhancing opportunities. Congress has categorized federal job opportunities into three tiers, with agencies in Tier One being the highest priority.

In signing your original award documents, you agreed to report annually on your progress in fulfilling your service obligation. Submitting your Service Agreement Report (SAR) annually is an important component of making a full and good faith effort to fulfill your service obligation, and it's the only official mechanism to make requests for service approval, an academic deferral or graduation date change, and more.

You must submit a SAR annually until your service obligation is fulfilled in its entirety, and report any work that may qualify for service. You will receive a final notification from NSEP when you have completed your service requirement.

Here are specifics on how the three tiers break down:

TIER ONE:

Any federal job in the Department of War, Department of State, Department of Homeland Security, and the Intelligence Community will fulfill your service requirement.

Please see the Office of the Director of National Intelligence website for a comprehensive list of agencies that fall within the Intelligence Community.



A few examples of Tier One jobs include: Language Center Analyst at the National Security Agency, Cyber Policy Analyst at the Department of War, Foreign Service Officer at a U.S. Embassy, and Intelligence Analyst at the Department of Homeland Security

In addition to working directly as an employee of the federal government, another path into government service that award recipients frequently make use of is:

CONTRACT WORK

You may also fulfill the service requirement under Tier One by working for a federal contractor. Federal contractors are individuals or employers who enter into a contract with the United States to perform a specific job. Contract positions with Tier Two agencies are not eligible for credit.

NSEP will review requests for service credit with a contractor only if the company is receiving funding from a Tier One Agency. There is no list of companies that are guaranteed to count toward your service requirement.

The funding instrument between the contracting company and the federal agency must be either a contract or cooperative agreement. Your work will not qualify for service credit if your position is funded by grants. If you think your work would qualify under this standard, once you have started working, you will need to submit a letter on official letterhead signed by your supervisor to certify your work on a federal contract. For more information on requesting service credit for contract work, please see the [“NSEP Deadlines and Requirements”](#) section.

If your position is partially funded by the federal government, it can count for partial credit, too. Service for partially funded work will be prorated in the same way service for part time work is prorated. Please see the Service Credit FAQ at the end of this section for details.



TIER TWO:

A Tier Two job is any federal position outside of Tier One with national security responsibilities. Examples of past jobs that have qualified as Tier Two include: Structural Engineer at the Department of Energy, International Trade Analyst at International Trade Administration in the Department of Commerce, and Sanctions Investigator at Office of Foreign Assets Control in the Department of Treasury. Some Tier Two Agencies, Bureaus and Offices have been pre-approved by the National Security Education Board. A current list can be found on pages 41 and 42 of this guidebook.

TIER THREE:

Lastly, work that you complete at a U.S.-based educational institution related to your NSEP-funded study could count toward your service requirement. Past award recipients have reported work in traditional academic positions, such as an Instructor or Assistant Professor teaching a subject related to your program and field of study. For Tier Three work, you must be educating U.S. citizens to receive credit.

Before you request credit for Tier Three work, you must have applied for at least 20 jobs in Tier One and/or Tier Two. Applications should be for jobs relevant to your education, experience, and skillset. For instance, following graduation, you could begin working as an assistant professor at a university. While working in that position, you could apply to federal jobs. If you were unsuccessful in your federal job search, then you could request that all of your work as an assistant professor count toward your service requirement.



Service Credit FAQ

Does part-time work count for credit?

Part-time work can count for service credit, but will be prorated based on a typical 40-hour workweek. For example, if an award recipient worked for a qualifying national security position in the FBI for 4 months on a schedule of approximately 25 hours/week, they could receive credit at a rate of 62.5%, for a total of about 2.5 months of service credit.

The rule about part-time work applies whether you work as a federal employee, contractor, or in an educational position. Please reach out to nsep@nsep.gov if you have more questions about how service credit is prorated.

Will X position count for service credit?

NSEP cannot pre-approve positions for service credit. All requests for credit outside of Tier One are considered on a case-by-case basis, and it will be up to you to convey how your position fulfills the terms of your NSEP service requirement. If you are requesting Tier Two service in a position outside the Agencies, Bureaus or Offices approved by the National Security Education Board, make a strong argument about how your position contributes to U.S. national security. If you are requesting Tier Three service, be sure to clearly demonstrate how your position relates directly and substantially to the language, region, and/or major for which NSEP funded your studies.

Does work in education have to be directly related to the language and area studied on my NSEP scholarship?

Educational positions for Tier Three credit must deal directly and substantially with the language, region, and/or major for which NSEP funded your studies.



What kinds of documentation should I be prepared to provide as proof that my work in education is related to my NSEP-funded study?

NSEP may request documentation, such as published class descriptions or class syllabi, as proof that your work in education deals directly and substantially with your NSEP funded studies. You are welcome to attach this information to your Service Agreement Report (SAR) when you are requesting service credit.

What types of education positions will satisfy the education provision?

Work as a professor, associate professor, teacher, volunteer, teaching assistant, etc. at an accredited U.S. university, college, or K-12 school may satisfy the service requirement under the conditions set forth above. This work must be distinct from your coursework if you are a student.

Additionally, you may receive service credit for administrative positions in education (such as coordinator of a study abroad program related to the geographic area for which you received NSEP funding) if you can demonstrate a sufficiently strong connection to your NSEP-funded language or major. In such cases, NSEP will consider granting service credit on a case-by-case basis depending on specific job duties and responsibilities.

Does the educational position I secure have to be a paid position?

A position can be paid or unpaid but must meet all the conditions set forth above. This is also true for Tier One and Tier Two volunteer positions. If you'd like to know more about fulfilling your service requirement through volunteer work, please reach out to the NSEP office at nsep@nsep.gov.



Main Takeaways

- There are many ways to fulfill your service requirement. Any position in the DoW, DHS, DoS, and IC can count for service credit.
- Work in other federal agencies may count. You must include a strong justification for how your position and its responsibilities directly relate to national security, unless you work under one of the bureaus or offices specified on page 42 and 43.
- Contracting positions in Tier One can also count, depending on the funding instrument, your argument, and other information in your contract support letter.
- Work in education can also count for service credit depending on the responsibilities of your position. Your role must be related to your NSEP-funded area of study, and you must be contributing to the education of U.S citizens. Before requesting work in Tier Three, you must also demonstrate proof of your good-faith job search efforts in Tiers One and Two in NSEPnet.





2. NSEP Deadlines and Requirements

In order to remain in good standing with the NSEP office, there are three major tasks you must keep track of: submitting your annual Service Agreement Report (SAR), creating and updating your USAJobs Resume, and updating your NSEPnet Job Search History Log. Find out more about each of these requirements below.

1) SAR Submissions

The Service Agreement Report is a digital document that NSEP uses to keep track of your progress toward fulfilling your service requirement, which you must submit annually through NSEPnet. Your first SAR is due within three months of completing your NSEP-funded program. Subsequent SARs are due annually until your service is fulfilled in full. You can fill out a SAR to request service credit, academic deferrals, and more. These options are explained in greater detail below:

A) No Service to Report

Choose this option if you need to submit your annual SAR but have not been working in a position that may fulfill the service requirement. This helps NSEP stay up to date with where you're at in the job search process.

B) Service in Fulfilment of Your Service Requirement

If you have service to report that may fulfill your requirement, submit a SAR for service and select the appropriate tier option. Please note that NSEP cannot pre-approve positions for service credit, which means that you can only submit a SAR for service after you've been working in your position for at least 40 hours. A supervisor will need to verify your SAR. Some types of positions, such as contractor work, require additional documentation—check out the [“How to use NSEPnet”](#) section of this guidebook for more details.

Keep in mind that you can complete your service in parts. For example, you might start off working on a government contract for six months and report this service to NSEP once the contract has ended. Then, you could later fulfill the rest of your service requirement by volunteering part-time with a U.S. embassy abroad. Once you begin fulfilling your service requirement and get your first SAR approved, you have five years from the day you started work to complete the requirement in full.

C) Academic Deferral

If you choose to continue your education after graduating from the degree program during which you received your NSEP award, you may be eligible for an academic deferral of your service obligation. Academic deferrals are granted to awardees who are enrolled at half-time status or greater in an accredited degree granting program. When you submit your SAR, make sure to provide a letter from your registrar with your program start and end dates, including the month, day, and year, and your enrollment status.



You can also use this option on your SAR to request a graduation date change for the degree program you were pursuing when you received your NSEP award, whether or not you've already graduated. Having the correct graduation date listed in NSEPnet is important, as this is the date NSEP will use to calculate your service deadline.

D) Extension

All NSEP award recipients are eligible for up to two one-year extensions of their service deadline. If you've passed your service deadline and haven't yet found a qualifying position, submit a SAR requesting an extension, including documentation of your job search efforts to date and your plan for obtaining federal employment in the future. Your plan should be clear, thorough, and achievable. Extensions are reviewed and adjudicated on a case-by-case basis.

E) Waiver

In cases of extraordinary hardship, you may be eligible to apply for a waiver of your service requirement.

Waivers are extremely rare and granted strictly on a case-by-case basis. In addition to demonstrating their good faith effort to find a job in fulfillment of the service requirement, awardees requesting a waiver must provide formal documentation as outlined in DoDI 1025.02. If you have any questions about the waiver application process or would like to discuss alternatives to the waiver option, please reach out to the NSEP Service Team at nsep@nsep.gov.

F) Repayment

If at any time you wish to repay your award, log onto your NSEPnet account to submit a SAR for repayment. For questions about the repayment process, please reach out to the NSEP Service Team at nsep@nsep.gov.



As you can see, your path to completing service and your service deadline might shift depending on whether you choose to further your education, complete service in parts, or need an extension. Above all, it's important to keep NSEP updated about wherever you are in this process by submitting your annual SAR. If you have any further questions about SAR submissions, feel free to consult the rest of this guidebook or reach out to the NSEP Service Team directly.

Before you submit your SAR, you'll have to ensure that you've updated your contact information in NSEPnet. This is a necessary part of SAR submissions, as well as staying in good standing. If there are any issues with your SAR submissions, NSEP will try to contact you through the information in your profile, so it's crucial you keep it up-to-date.

After you submit a SAR, the NSEP office will send you an email to confirm the approval or denial of your request. You may also check your NSEPnet account for this information.

2) Resume

You are also required to create and maintain a resume on USAJobs. You can find the USAJobs resume builder tool by navigating to your profile, and then selecting the "Documents" tab in the ribbon at the top of the page. From there, find the option to build your resume. Your USAJobs resume should be complete, up-to-date, free of grammar and spelling errors, and generally professional.

For all advertised positions, including those featured on NSEPnet that require you to send a resume directly to a hiring official, you should use a conventional professional resume formatted in whatever document type is specified. Many federal positions, such as those listed on USAJobs, require you to add further information specific to the federal hiring process.



The USAJobs resume builder is a great place to start, but we recommend adjusting the formatting and tailoring it before you start including it in your applications. You can find sample resumes, including a federal resume example, on NSEPnet's home page, to help you with those next steps. You should complete your resume online within one year of completing your NSEP funded program.

3) Job Search History Log

The other way we'll ask you to keep track of your federal job search is by using the Job Search History Log on NSEPnet. In this Log, you'll have the ability to record federal positions you've applied for.

Keep a record of every job application you submit, as well as your efforts to follow up and the results of your application. Regularly updating your Job Search History Log will help you keep track of where you're at in the job search process and demonstrate your progress towards fulfilling your service requirement. This is a crucial step in showing NSEP that you have been making a good faith effort to fulfill your requirement.

More information can be found on how to utilize the Job Search History Log in the next section of this guide.

Main Takeaways

- Use NSEPnet to submit Service Agreement Reports (SARs). Annual SAR submissions are an important NSEP requirement and are necessary for your account to remain in good standing.
- You can submit a SAR to request service credit, extensions, and academic deferrals, as well as to repay your award. You should submit a SAR annually, even if you have no service to report.
- You can submit service in parts across multiple positions.
- Keeping your resume on USAJobs up to date will not only help you stay in good standing with NSEP, but also allow you to more easily apply to the exclusive jobs posted on NSEPnet.
- To remain in good standing with NSEP, any federal job that you apply to should be logged on NSEPnet's Job Search History Log tool. This helps demonstrate your progress towards fulfilling your NSEP service requirement.





3. How to Use NSEPnet

1) Logging In

What is my NSEPnet username?

The activation email sent to you after you complete your program will include your NSEPnet username, which you'll then use to activate your account. If you've forgotten your username, please consult that email or reach out to the NSEP Service Team at nsep@nsep.gov.

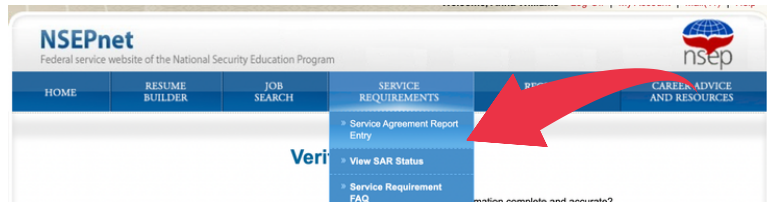
What is my NSEPnet password?

If this is your first time logging in, you'll be required to create a password as a part of the account setup process. You can also use the "Forgot Password" link on the login page to receive further instructions.

2) Submitting SARs

How do I submit a SAR?

Once logged into NSEPnet, you will find the SAR submission wizard under the “Service Requirement” tab in the top menu bar. After that, select the checkbox on the SAR form that applies to you.



When submitting a SAR for service or a deferral, it may be useful to consult a date duration calendar to ensure accuracy when calculating the amount of time you’ve worked, especially when calculating part-time or partially funded federal service.

Can I submit a SAR for a job I haven’t started yet, but am about to start?

You can only receive service credit for work that you have already completed. There is no way to receive service credit for a future position, or work that has not yet been done. The minimum amount of service that can be reported on a SAR is 40 hours of work.

How do I know if my supervisor has signed off on my SAR?

When you submitted your SAR, an email containing a verification link was automatically sent to the supervisor you indicated on the form. Your supervisor was asked to review your employment and follow the link to acknowledge that the information you provided is correct. This acknowledgement serves as their signature.



Once your supervisor has signed, you will automatically get an email confirming that your supervisor has verified your SAR. If you don't receive this email, first make sure your NSEP emails aren't being diverted to your spam folder. Then, follow up with your supervisor to ensure the verification email was not diverted to their spam folder. The emails come from noreply@nsepnet.org. You can also check the verification status of your SAR on your NSEPnet account.

How do I submit contract work for service credit?

Remember that for your time with a federal contractor to count toward your service requirement, you must be working on a contract or cooperative agreement (not a grant!) funded by a Tier One federal agency.

To certify your work on a federal contract, you will need to submit a letter on official letterhead signed by your supervisor with your SAR. This letter must include as much of the following information as possible about the contract(s):

1. Type of funding instrument (e.g., contract or cooperative agreement)
2. Contracting federal department
3. Contract number
4. Contract status
5. Percentage of your position funded by federal dollars
6. Description and confirmation of your role in the contract
7. The dates you worked on that contract



How do I submit a SAR for Tier Two service?

The National Security Education Program defines Tier Two service as federal positions with national security responsibilities in any agency outside of Tier One. NSEP considers all Tier Two service requests outside of the Agencies, Bureaus and Offices approved by the National Security Education Board on a case-by-case basis. To be eligible for Tier Two service consideration outside what has been approved by the National Security Education Board, you must include an argument in your SAR articulating your position's relevance to national security.

What does work in National Security look like?

National security includes protecting and promoting American well-being in the areas of defense, diplomacy, homeland security, and specific challenges of global issues facing the U.S.

To successfully petition for Tier Two Service Credit, you must:

- Clearly articulate your contribution to U.S. national security and have a supervisor verify and confirm that contribution.
- Describe your daily job responsibilities, your organization's mission, and how its mission relates to U.S. national security. You will need to draw a clear and concise connection between your work and its national security implications. Ask yourself: "Why is the work I do critical?" and convey this in the form of a national security argument.
- Be deliberate in your efforts. The quality of your national security argument will directly impact whether your service request is approved.



If you fail to write a compelling national security argument, the NSEP Service Committee will deny your service request.

What Shouldn't My National Security Argument Look Like?

Example 1)

“I contribute to national security through my position with the International Trade Administration at the Department of Commerce. The ITA’s mission is to increase competitiveness of U.S. businesses and enforce laws and agreements to bolster free trade. The ITA also contributes to national security by promoting exports of U.S. goods and services, which increases global economic security and the prosperity of the U.S. economy.”

What's wrong here?

While this argument does a good job of describing the organization’s national security responsibilities, it doesn’t give any information about the awardee’s daily job duties and contribution to U.S. national security.

Example 2)

“As a Program Analyst for the Department of Energy, my responsibilities include the following:

- Support data storage and retrieval systems for web applications that reduce exposure and environmental risks.
- Facilitate inter-office collaboration through technical outreach and conference planning. Collect and analyze data and develop hazard assessment methods, tools, databases, and models.”

What's wrong here?

This awardee clearly copied and pasted a description of their job duties from a job announcement. Not only is this unoriginal material, but there is no description of the organization’s national security implications, nor a connection between the listed job duties and national security.



Example 3)

“As an International Relations Officer for the Department of Labor’s Bureau of International Labor Affairs, my typical job duties include utilizing my Russian skills to conduct research and analyzing situations of forced labor, child labor, and human trafficking in Eastern European countries. The mission of the Bureau of International Labor Affairs is to improve global working conditions, raise living standards, protect workers’ ability to exercise their rights, and address the workplace exploitation of children and other vulnerable populations.”

What’s wrong here?

This argument doesn’t clearly make a connection between the daily job duties and responsibilities, the mission of the organization, and its contribution to national security. In fact, the words “national security” never appear in this example.

What should my national security argument look like?

DO

- Articulate your job duties through a national security lens
- Elaborate on your own role within your organization, from your own perspective
- Write your own original argument
- Include the words “national security” in your argument
- Provide the full name of your organization(s)
- Be succinct and concise in your argument - i.e., be detailed, but to the point

DON’T

- Paste your job description from the application
- Focus solely on the mission of the organization
- Reuse another NSEP awardee’s argument
- Fail to mention how your role impacts national security
- Rely solely on the use of acronyms without spelling them out
- Exceed the 1,200 character limit within the SAR outlining your position



Tier Two Argument Template

“I currently serve as a(n) [JOB TITLE] at [ORGANIZATION]. [ORGANIZATION]’s mission is [MISSION]. My daily job duties and responsibilities in this role include [JOB DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES]. The work that I do with [ORGANIZATION] contributes to U.S. national security because [REASONING/RATIONALE].”

How do I submit work in education for service credit?

To petition to receive credit for appropriate work in education, an award recipient must have exhausted all opportunities to fulfill the service requirement in the four priority organizations, as well as other federal organizations in positions with national security responsibilities—in other words, jobs that qualify under Tier One or Two.

Whether an award recipient has exhausted all opportunities will be measured by:

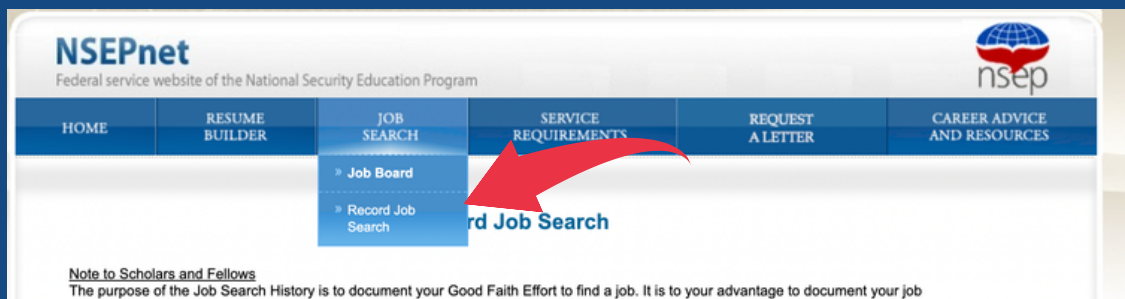
- A minimum 12-month job search for appropriate federal work
- Quality, quantity, and appropriateness of job applications submitted
- Variety of job search resources and strategies used
- Quality of follow-through on job applications
- Flexibility demonstrated (such as a willingness to relocate, willingness to apply to jobs beyond ideal position and to jobs that may not be at ideal level of authority, willingness to apply to positions that are only broadly related to career goals, etc.)
- Mitigating circumstances



3) Job Search

How do I record a job application submission?

1. Log on to NSEPnet, per the instructions given under “Logging In” above.
2. Click “Record Job Search” under the “Job Search” tab.
3. Follow the instructions given to add a job application or make general comments about your job search efforts.



You can view your Job Search History Log by clicking “View Complete History” on your Homepage or by clicking the “Record Job Search” tab.

Note that any application you submit to a federal contractor can be recorded by selecting the contracting agency, clicking “Other” under the bureau dropdown menu, and then clicking “Add New” and inputting the name of the contractor as CTR: [name of company].



4) Other Important Things

How do I change my graduation date?

Whether you're taking a little bit longer to finish your degree program or need to retroactively change your graduation date, you must first send in a SAR and documentation of the new graduation date. Verification must take the form of an official letter from the award recipient's advisor or registrar on official letterhead, which includes your enrollment status, and the day, month, and year of your program start and end dates. We will then update your service deadline on NSEPnet.

What is a Letter of Certification?

A Letter of Certification is your proof that you received an NSEP award and are eligible to make use of NSEP's hiring authorities. You can request a Letter of Certification to include in a job application, which will prove that you have the hiring authorities that are granted to you as an NSEP award recipient with an active service requirement, or to verify your excepted service eligibility if a hiring official or a human resources representative requests proof.

How do I request a Letter of Certification?

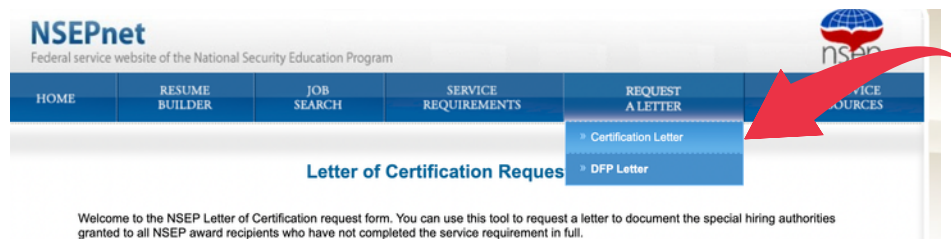
Once logged into NSEPnet, click the "Certification Letter" button in the top menu bar. Before you can request a letter, you must answer a series of questions to ensure you still meet the eligibility requirements for NSEP's special hiring authorities. After filling out the questionnaire, provide as much of the following information as possible to request a Letter of Certification:



- The name of the department/agency/office to which you are applying
- The name of the contact at that office (to whom the letter should be addressed)
- The mailing address to which the letter could be sent (include a street and street number)
- The announcement closing date
- Where you found out about the job.

You can also choose to request a generic Letter of Certification to attach to multiple job applications.

NSEP will send you the letter by email to upload with your application or forward it to your point of contact. Generally, Letters of Certification should be completed within three to five business days.





4. How to Find a Federal Job

You might be wondering, now that I know how to use NSEPnet and submit a SAR requesting service credit, how am I supposed to find a job in the first place?

Your success in a national competition will serve as an asset in securing a federal job, but the responsibility is yours to find qualifying employment. When applying for jobs, make sure to be professional and concise. Every email or letter that you send should be spell checked and re-read. Your potential employer will meet, talk to, or receive emails from many applicants. If your responses are misspelled or unfocused, the potential employer will move on, and you will lose the opportunity. The first impression you create, whether in writing or over the phone, should make the hiring official want to follow up with you.

While NSEP can't find you a job, we do provide career advice and resources that can help you in your search. Here are a few tips to help you direct your applications to the right places in the right way.



What kinds of jobs should I apply for?

You can refer to Section One of this Guidebook to determine what kinds of jobs will fulfill your service requirement.

To find a federal position that fits your needs and abilities, you should:

1) Know your GS level(s). This is the standard pay scale of the federal government, and it is determined by your previous experience. Each agency classifies, appoints, and pays its employees based on this system.

Most graduates with a bachelor's degree will be hired at a GS-07 level. The table below shows how you can qualify for different job levels, either through education or through experience.

Grade	Education	Experience
GS-5	4-year course of study leading to a bachelor's degree	None
GS-7	4-year course of study leading to a bachelor's degree	1 year equivalent to at least GS-5
GS-9	1 full year of graduate level education or superior academic achievement	1 year equivalent to at least GS-7
GS-11	master's or equivalent graduate degree or 2 full years of progressively higher-level graduate education leading to such a degree or LL.B. or J.D., if related	1 year equivalent to at least GS-9
GS-12 and above	Ph.D. or equivalent doctoral degree or 3 full years of progressively higher-level graduate education leading to such a degree or LL.M., if related	1 year equivalent to at least next lower grade level



For example, you qualify as a GS-11 if you have completed a master's degree or if you have worked in a GS-09 equivalent position for at least one year. When applying to jobs, make sure to note the GS levels that the agency is hiring for. Get comfortable with what is required of each level so that you're applying for jobs that are within your reach.

2) Know your occupational series. You can search USAJobs for the specific types of positions you are interested in by narrowing your search by classification codes. For instance, every Intelligence Specialist position listed on USAJobs will be given the occupational series code of 0132, and you can do an advanced search in USAJobs for this number to find all jobs in intelligence currently posted on the site.

For more information on occupational series, check out the Office of Personnel Management's [Handbook of Occupational Groups and Families](#). The Handbook includes a list of all white-collar occupational series codes.

3) Consider applying for positions through the Pathways Program. The Pathways Program includes Internships, the Recent Graduates Program, and many other similar programs. These opportunities are exclusively available for individuals who are currently enrolled in a degree-seeking program or who have recently graduated from one. For more information, check out the [Recent Graduates page on USAJobs](#).

In particular, Recent Graduates positions offer a good opportunity to begin working in the federal government. Many federal agencies participate in the Recent Graduates Program and post these opportunities on USAJOBS.gov. Note that some Recent Graduate jobs will allow you to apply before you graduate; look on the USAJobs announcement to verify the requirements for each Recent Graduates job.



Additionally, working as a Pathways intern while you are enrolled in a degree program (and after you complete your NSEP funded program) can benefit you in many ways. Some internships will require a security clearance, which is a great way to obtain a clearance and become more competitive in the federal job market. Your internship work may also count towards your service requirement.

4) If you are a STEM student, check out the [SMART Scholarship Program](#) through the Department of War. Through this program, you can receive a full scholarship for an undergraduate, graduate, or doctoral degree in the sciences and receive guaranteed employment after graduation in a DoW qualifying agency of your selection.

5) Apply to a variety of jobs!

Aim high, but additionally try for some jobs you know you're qualified for. Also, try to apply for jobs in a variety of agencies. You might find that you really like a job that you weren't sure about initially.

What if you are absolutely in love with one specific job path (say, Foreign Service Officer or Intelligence Specialist) and want to focus all of your energy on that job application?

While you may ultimately get that position, it is a good idea to apply to other jobs in order to have a safety net and build experience as you work toward your goals. Applying for multiple jobs and logging them in the NSEPnet Job Search History Log will also help you show your good-faith effort to NSEP.



How do I get a security clearance?

Only the government may issue you a security clearance, and generally, you may only get one if you have a federal job or are offered one. Federal contractors may sponsor you for a clearance if you are hired to work on a position that requires one as well. If you are offered a job that requires a clearance, you will submit paperwork that lists your past residences and, in some cases, contains information about your personal history. While you are waiting for the clearance, you may be able to work on material and issues related to your job that do not require a clearance. NSEP cannot help you obtain or expedite a security clearance.

When should I start applying?

We encourage you to begin looking for a position at least one year before you plan to begin work. The federal hiring process can be lengthy, so be prepared to be patient and persistent. If you're interested in a position that requires a security clearance beyond Secret, it's a good idea to start even earlier, as those clearance processes can take a year or longer. That said, when you receive a conditional offer of employment, don't quit whatever role you may be in or stop your job search immediately, you'll want to accept your final offer and receive a start date before you do either of those things.

Please be aware that in most cases you cannot undergo a clearance process while overseas; this particularly applies to the clearance process for positions in the intelligence community. If you have finished your NSEP-funded program, you may begin your job search abroad, but use discretion when accessing government websites. Do not contact intelligence agencies while you are outside of the U.S.

Also, keep in mind that some federal agencies won't want to hire someone before they complete their degree. If you need more information about a certain position's requirements, try contacting the hiring official or point of contact listed in the job announcement.



Where should I start looking?

Good news: you may fulfill the service requirement by working for the U.S. government in a position that deals with national security issues anywhere in the world! While there are a wide variety of federal jobs in the DC area, there are also many options available internationally and nationwide. Here are some places to start:

1) NSEP Exclusive Jobs

Our office regularly sends out jobs exclusive to NSEP award recipients via email. These positions are ones we've set up with agencies in order to expedite the traditional hiring processes (using hiring authorities) and allow you to get your foot in the door of the federal government faster.

You'll be automatically enrolled in this mass email listserv once you've completed your NSEP-funded program. Our office also features USAJobs postings on NSEPnet that we have researched and believe NSEP awardees may be good candidates for. Additional details about USAJobs are included directly below.

2) USAJobs: We encourage you to continue your job search at USAJobs, a searchable database that includes many open positions in the federal government. You can search for jobs by location, keywords, GS level, department/agency, or other criteria.

Note: If a job on USAJobs requires "status," you cannot apply through the public announcement on the website. Instead, you should contact the hiring official as soon as possible to explain your eligibility for non-competitive hiring.



“Status” means government tenure, so unless you are already a permanent federal employee, you are not eligible to apply for this job through normal procedures. However, you can contact the hiring official (who is different from the HR contact) to explain your qualifications and special hiring authorities.

3) Want to work in intelligence? [Intelligencecareers.gov](https://www.intelligencecareers.gov) is a great place to start. The intelligence community currently consists of 17 different organizations, which can be viewed at the website for the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. You can begin by looking for an intelligence job on USAJobs, but many intelligence positions may not be listed there. To find more positions, go to www.intelligencecareers.gov, where you can find links to the websites of individual intelligence organizations that currently have job openings.

4) Finally, network! Talk to your peers, professors, and former supervisors, and take advantage of your connections with other award recipients. Research the NSEP Alumni Association (<https://www.nsepalum.org>), where you can exchange tips with and learn about interesting jobs from fellow NSEP awardees. Once people within the government find out that you can be non-competitively hired, they may contact you regarding open positions in their offices that you’d be qualified for. Please note that the NSEP Alumni Association is not directly endorsed by NSEP, they are listed here for your reference.

How to network, you ask? First, know what your goals are. Think about how you wish to use your network and identify some relevant people. Reach out to these people individually, and make sure to include your preferred methods of contact. Whenever possible, try to meet each person face-to-face at a professional meeting.

If you’re not able to travel, write thoughtful emails, plan phone conversations, or schedule video teleconferences. Exchange information about your goals and your career search. Remember to follow up with your contacts.



There are many ways to keep records and maintain your network, whether through an address book or via apps and websites like LinkedIn. Use whichever method you prefer, but try to keep track of information like where you met, who introduced you, and what you talked about. You can use this information to make it easier to reach out to your contacts and maintain a good rapport. Make sure that after adding someone new, you follow up with them. This can be a simple message letting them know you value the connection made or just to thank them for their time. This will leave a more memorable and positive impression.



How can I write a good federal resume?

For federal job applications on USAJobs, you shouldn't use the same resume that you do for the private sector. When applying for NSEP exclusive jobs, you can submit a federal resume. Here are some important points to remember when writing a federal resume:

- Tailor each resume to the specific position you're applying for. Your resume should change to address your skills and qualifications listed in the position description.
- Federal resumes should be limited to two pages, so you should be mindful to only include relevant information.
- Use precise language—include numbers, percentages, and the impact of your past work, if possible.
- Include months and years for all positions and academic programs you list.
- Demonstrate work experience by describing the jobs that you have had, emphasizing skills that the job that you're applying for requires. Federal employers will often not look at the skills you list at the beginning of your resume but want you to show how you developed and used skills within past positions.
- Include as many relevant key words from the position description as you can in your resumes, namely in your own position descriptions or job duties section, so that you can demonstrate that you have the skills needed for the job.
- You can include volunteer work in your past job experience.
- You should also include your language skills and note your NSEP award on your resume.



- Make sure to include the following line (or some variation thereof) in your resume: “Non-competitive eligibility for appointment to federal positions in the excepted service under Schedule A (r) and NDAA FY 13, and eligible for non-competitive conversion to the competitive service under NDAA'13.” This line can go anywhere in your resume. However, try to put it somewhere near the top, or under a section in which you mention your NSEP award.
- Make sure there are no typos and that you use standard formatting (Times New Roman, size 11-13 is a good baseline).
- And remember, have all relevant documents handy if you are asked for an interview in case you need to refresh your memory. A good way to keep track of all your different resumes and applications is to create a folder on your computer for each job application. You can keep a copy of your resume, the job announcement, and the occupational questionnaire (if you had to fill one out) in each folder, and you can use similar resumes for similar applications.

For more information on how to create a federal resume, see NSEP's Sample Federal Resume on NSEPnet.

I haven't heard back about my USAJobs application. What should I do?

Each position advertised on USAJobs typically attracts a number of well-qualified candidates. Some of your applications may receive no response regarding whether you've been selected to move forward in the hiring process. If you don't hear back, it isn't necessarily a reflection on your skills or qualifications, but rather on the sheer volume of applications received. Finding a job in the federal government can be a long process, and it requires a lot of initiative on your part. Be persistent and be prepared to submit applications for a variety of positions. If there's a job that you're particularly interested in, it might also help to follow up.



Contact the organization where the job is located. You may be able to talk to the Human Resources department and ask about the status of your application. Make sure that you keep the vacancy announcement number and the date that you filed your application. And don't forget to record your job search activities on the Job Search History Log.

If you don't get a certain job, it can also be a good idea to follow up with hiring officials about why you weren't selected and how you can improve for the future.

What do I do at a job fair?

Before you go, you should understand that representatives of federal agencies at job fairs most likely can't get you an interview for a job that is posted on USAJobs. While private sector organizations (such as contractors) could ask you for an interview if they meet you and like you at a job fair, hiring representatives using USAJobs can only arrange interviews with the applicants who are identified as the most qualified through an agency-level, multi-step process.

However, if you are interested in an NSEP Exclusive position or in working with a contractor, hiring officials have a lot more flexibility to invite you for an interview or look at your resume.

Use this opportunity to ask questions and seek information. Ask hiring officials what they look for in good applicants - what skills you should be working on, application tips, and anything else you are curious about. Also ask when they will be hiring and for what kinds of positions. That way, you can be prepared for when positions do open up.



Finally, don't just give your resume and ask what the hiring official can do for you. Try to be unique and make sure to ask the person about their job and what they do - this will help you to stand out from the crowd and will make them more likely to remember you. Above all, be respectful and mindful of the official's time.

Help, I have an interview!

You can check out the resources at www.gogovernment.org for tips on interviewing with the government. You can also schedule a mock interview with NSEP by emailing the general inbox, nsep@nsep.gov, to get prepared for the real thing.

Try talking with friends and colleagues who know you well and can help you prepare answers to questions like “what are your best traits?” Think about what kinds of questions you might be asked and have some ideas ready. Minimize vocal fillers like “um” and “like,” and go forth with the confidence that this organization needs the skills that you have. Although it can be hard to feel like you're bragging, realize that you have to talk yourself up to show how valuable you are!

It's also important to give several in-depth examples of experiences you have had for every question you are asked in an interview. Be concise, detailed, and organized in your response. Be sure to talk about the situation you were in, the task you needed to fulfill, the actions you took to fulfill it, and the results of your decisions. Even if you don't have extensive experience with a particular duty of the position you are interviewing for, discuss prior work with similar responsibilities to demonstrate your qualifications.

Last but not least, don't forget to dress to impress!





5. Hiring Authorities

Hiring authorities are tools that allow agencies to more quickly hire qualified applicants. After you finish your NSEP-funded program, you'll have two hiring authorities available to you: NDAA'13 and Schedule A(r). You will have these hiring authorities until you complete your service requirement in full, after which you will no longer be eligible for appointment under these authorities through NSEP. Both authorities allow hiring managers to non-competitively appoint NSEP awardees to excepted service positions. This means that you are eligible to apply for jobs that aren't advertised to the public. You may also benefit from the hiring authorities in the following ways:

- You may be a more competitive applicant for jobs that are available to the general public.
- NSEP Exclusive jobs are emailed out as hiring officials contact us with exclusive openings.
- A federal organization can create a position for you or tell you about a position before advertising it to the general public
- The hiring process may be faster than it would be for an applicant who does not have hiring authorities.



These advantages are all extremely useful in your job search, and you should advertise them as much as you can when you present yourself to hiring officials!

You're encouraged to put them in your resume and cover letter as well. You'll also want to request a Letter of Certification from the NSEP Service Team via NSEPnet. If an application asks you to indicate whether you have any special hiring authorities, answer "yes" if they mention Schedule A(r) or NDAA'13. Even on applications that do not specifically ask about your hiring authorities, you can (and should) attach a Letter of Certification to your application to make sure that hiring officials know you possess these advantages. See the Section Three of this guidebook for information on how to request a Letter of Certification.

You will have non-competitive eligibility for federal hiring under the Schedule A(r) and NDAA'13 hiring authorities as long as you still have an outstanding service obligation to NSEP. **Once you have fulfilled your service requirement, you will no longer be eligible for appointment under these authorities.** In order for the Service Team to certify your hiring authority eligibility, you must remain in good standing by reporting all service to the NSEP office and by meeting your annual SAR submission deadline.

The next few pages will summarize important information to know about both hiring authorities, along with the differences between them.



NDAA'13:

- Excepted service appointment.
- For use by select agencies with national security responsibilities.
- Upon satisfactory completion of two years of continuous federal service in an excepted service position, awardees may be converted to a career or career-conditional appointment.
- Generally, after having worked for the three years of continuous creditable service, you will be eligible to attain a career appointment status of Permanent.

VS

SCHEDULE A(r):

- Leads to a temporary/term appointment, not to exceed four years.
- You are not a permanent employee; once your appointment comes to an end you are required to re-apply for your job through the competitive hiring process.
- Can work to your advantage because federal agencies have a ceiling on the number of full-time equivalent employees they may hire, and some federal offices may be able to hire you under Schedule A(r) without having to count you against this ceiling.



Both NDAA'13 and Schedule A(r) are useful for expediting the processes associated with traditional hiring in the federal government. The main difference between both hiring authorities is that under NDAA'13, with your office's discretion, you may, upon satisfactory completion of two years of substantially continuous service, convert, without competition, to a career or career-conditional appointment. Schedule A(r), on the other hand, does not allow for this conversion option. However, if you're hired under Schedule A(r), with your office's discretion, they might be able to reappoint you using NDAA'13.

As NDAA'13 provides the option for your employer to convert you to a permanent position, we recommend that you ask to be appointed under this authority, but it's important to note that not all agencies have the ability to hire someone directly through NDAA'13. The following is a list of agencies that, as per legislation, approved by the National Security Education Board to utilize NDAA'13.

- Department of War: All departments, agencies, commands, and activities
- Department of State: All bureaus, agencies and offices
- Department of Homeland Security: All agencies and offices
- Intelligence Community: All agencies and offices
- Department of Commerce: Bureau of Industry and Security; Office of the General Counsel; International Trade Administration; Commercial Law Development Program
- Department of Energy: National Nuclear and Security Administration; Office of Nuclear Energy, Science and Technology; Office of Policy and International Affairs; National laboratories
- Department of Health and Human Services: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; Assistant Secretary of Public Affairs
- Department of Housing and Urban Development: Office of Field Policy and Management



- Department of Justice: Criminal Division; Drug Enforcement Administration; Federal Bureau of Investigation; National Drug Intelligence Center; National Virtual Translation Center
- Department of Labor; Bureau of International Labor Affairs
- Department of Transportation: Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration
- Department of the Treasury: Office of Foreign Assets Control; Office of International Affairs
- Department of Veterans Affairs
- Environmental Protection Agency
- Executive Office of the President: National Security Council Staff; Office of Management and Budget-National Security and International Affairs Division; Office of National Drug Control Policy; Office of Science and Technology Policy; Office of the U.S. Trade Representative
- National Aeronautics and Space Administration: Office of International and Interagency Relations
- Independent Agencies: Export-Import Bank of the U.S.; Overseas Private Investment Corporation; Millennium Challenge Corporation; National Labor Relations Board; Peace Corps; United States International Trade Commission; United States African Development Foundation
- United States Congress: Congressional Budget Office: Defense and International Affairs; Congressional Research Service

Now that you know how to use your hiring authorities, you can get to work on your federal job applications! You might now be asking, “But what do I do after I get a job offer? Will I need a security clearance? When should I report my service to NSEP?” Read on to the next section to learn more about this process!



Main Takeaways

- As an NSEP awardee, you have access to two hiring authorities that allow you to be non-competitively hired in select federal agencies.
- NDAA'13 provides your employer the opportunity to convert you to a career-conditional or career status based on continuous, successful performance.
- Schedule A(r) won't allow any kind of conversion but can be used by many more organizations.
- You should request a Letter of Certification from NSEPnet for every federal application you submit to advertise these authorities.
- After finishing your service requirement, you will no longer be eligible for appointment under the NSEP hiring authorities.





6. What to Do After Receiving a Job Offer

First, congratulate yourself on a job (application) well done! For most positions that require a security clearance, you will usually receive a conditional offer of employment (COE) or temporary job offer (TJO) from your agency, which is contingent upon ultimately being granted the clearance. You will then have to fill out the necessary paperwork for your clearance (make sure you turn these documents in on time!) and after that, you'll await adjudication.

The amount of time that it takes for a security clearance to process can vary depending on the person and the level of the clearance. Be patient and be aware of the possibility that you may not be favorably adjudicated. You can still apply for other jobs, and you may accept more than one conditional job offer at a time. Proceed carefully when you're trying to decide whether this is appropriate or not. There have been cases before when an awardee accepted more than one conditional offer, which resulted in confusion on the government's side and slowed down the process.



Fill out all forms for your security clearance in a precise and timely manner in order to minimize complications with your clearance. A very common reason security clearances are delayed is incomplete information on the security forms. Make sure you fill in all blanks and enter N/A if the question does not apply to you.

Keep good records of your foreign travel, where you lived while abroad, and the name and contact information of your landlord. Having this information on hand will help you to complete the paperwork required to undergo a security clearance process more easily. You'll also need to list a contact who can verify your overseas study and travel. The security investigators will contact them to ascertain that you actually were where you said you were, doing what you said you were doing.

If your program is outside the U.S, when you travel, if your visit is longer than a week or so, register with the State Department Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP). Tell them where you are living and that you are an NSEP-funded awardee. They will make a record, and you can tell the security investigators that you made this report. Be able to document what you are doing during breaks in your program. Keep records of the people you visit throughout the host country. These records will be valuable when you apply for a security clearance.

In terms of your potential salary and benefits, you can take a look at the resources available at <https://gogovernment.org> to review everything you should know about negotiation, or check out the Negotiation Guide on NSEPnet. Although you usually won't be able to negotiate your salary in a federal position, you do sometimes have flexibility to negotiate the step within your grade level. Please note that you may negotiate your salary, benefits, and other incentives for a contracting position. You may also be able to receive tuition assistance in federal or contracting positions.

There's no need to submit a SAR immediately after starting your job unless you are approaching your service deadline. Your requirement is to submit at least one SAR annually.





7. Language Sustainment

After finishing your NSEP program, it can be hard to keep up with your language abilities. Whether or not you're able to find a position that incorporates your skills, here are some ideas and resources that can help you maintain proficiency.

Note: we do not endorse any of these organizations, they are simply listed for your reference.



- Commercial language websites and apps: Some apps also offer opportunities for spoken exchange and individual tutoring, which may be more helpful for advanced students.
- The Online Diagnostic Assessment (ODA): A tool developed by the Defense Language Institute, Foreign Language Center to help foreign language learners evaluate and manage their learning. The ODA identifies a learner's strengths and needs in a foreign language and provides the learner with individualized, relevant feedback. All Assessment texts are selected or adapted from authentic sources in accordance with the ILR level descriptions. <https://oda.dliflc.edu>.
- Joint Language University: An online language training center available to the general public, with enhanced resources for government employees who register with a .mil or .gov account. Some benefits for the latter include one-click access (no login required) to licensed resources.
- Language exchanges: Look at local community groups to see if there are any language exchanges in your area. Many universities also have their own language exchange programs and clubs. For less commonly taught languages, searching for online exchange groups may help you find other learners or native speakers to practice with if you can't find anyone in your area.
- Ask around! See if your current employer or university offers language courses or sustainment. You can also search online for the specific materials you're looking for. For example, most streaming services offer videos and movies in foreign languages. Finally, you can ask friends and colleagues if they know anyone who speaks the language at a high level whom they could introduce you to.





8. Vocabulary

NSEP VOCABULARY

SAR: Service Agreement Report. Fill out one of these to report to NSEP on the status of your award.

- No service: Choose this option if you have not passed your service deadline and are not currently engaged in service that will fulfill your service requirement.
- Deferral: Choose this option if you are furthering your education in an accredited degree program and are enrolled at half-time status or more (e.g., graduate school, doctoral degree), or if you need to change the graduation date of the degree program during which you received NSEP funding.
- Extension: Choose this option if you are past your service deadline. All awardees are eligible for two 12-month extensions of their deadlines but must first petition the NSEP office to receive the appeal. Awardees on extensions must submit SARs biannually.
- Service: Choose this option if you are currently engaged in service which you believe could count towards your service requirement.



Repayment: At any point, you can elect to repay your award in lieu of fulfilling your service requirement. To do so, log onto NSEPnet and submit a SAR for repayment. Interest is charged one time (when the individual begins repayment) at a rate of 1%. Therefore, if an awardee decided to repay their award of \$20,000, their total repayment amount would be \$20,200.

COMMON FEDERAL VOCABULARY AND TERMS

Career and career-conditional employee: Permanent federal career status or "government tenure" may be gained upon completion of an individual's probationary period and a three-year career-conditional period in the competitive service. This will be noted on a federal employee's Standard Form 50 in Box 24, "Tenure"; career-conditional employees will have a 2 in this box and tenured career employees will have a 1.

Competitive civil service: Most federal government civil service jobs fall under this category. Positions are filled through a fair, open and merit-based process, unless excepted by statute, Executive Order or OPM action.

Declaration for Federal Employment: This form—provided during the application process or before employment begins— documents a candidate's fulfillment of the two requirements for federal employment: US citizenship and, for men born after December 31, 1959, compliance with US Selective Service registration.

Excepted service: Positions not covered by certain competitive civil service personnel rules and regulations. For example, employees who serve at the discretion of the current presidential administration—commonly referred to as "Schedule C" employees—are excepted because they have policy determining responsibilities or serve as key administration officials. Some awardees may be hired as excepted service employees if they are brought on under Schedule A(r) or NDAA '13, which allows them to be hired without a competitive application process.



Federal resume: There is no mandated federal resume template, although some vacancy postings may have their own resume form for you to fill in when you apply. It is simply a resume that contains all the information required to apply for a federal job, including personal information, education, work experience, and job-related skills and training.

General Schedule (GS) pay: The general pay scale system for many white-collar jobs in the federal government. Positions are identified by GS level, from GS-1 to GS-15. Higher GS levels mean higher levels of pay and responsibility. New hires are assigned to a GS level based on past professional and academic experience. Within each GS level, you may be placed into one of ten steps, each of which corresponds to a different salary level within the GS level. You may move up to a higher step after you have completed some federal service, or you may be hired at a higher step if the government wants to match your pay from a previous job or offer you other incentives.

Occupational questionnaire: Included in some applications, it assesses a candidate's qualifications through detailed multiple choice or yes-or-no questions.

Public trust designation: A position that requires an applicant to undergo a background check.

Questionnaire for National Security Positions (SF-86): Used for background checks of applicants for national security positions requiring a security clearance, this form includes questions about educational background, past and current employers, police records, financial situation, and drug and alcohol usage.



Superior academic achievement: Graduation from an accredited four-year college or university will qualify an individual for a GS-5 level position in many occupations. Superior academic achievement, defined as graduation in the upper third of one's college class, a GPA of B or higher or membership in a nationally recognized honor society, like Phi Beta Kappa, will qualify for a GS-7 level position.

Status candidates: Job applicants who currently work for the federal government and certain former federal employees. NS awards do not grant a person “status,” so be wary when applying for jobs that consider only status candidates. It is best in this case to contact the hiring official specific to an application and inquire about who their agency is looking to hire.

Temporary or term position: Appointments used to fill nonpermanent positions. Temporary positions are filled for one year or less; employees do not receive benefits. Term employment may last from one to four years, and employees generally have the same benefits as permanent employees. All Schedule A(r) hires are brought into temporary or term positions.

Upward Mobility Program: Agencies can use this program to groom talent by creating or restructuring positions to be filled by promising entry-level applicants who will then be offered training and other career-development opportunities.

Veterans' preference: In the competitive process, veterans may receive preferential consideration, based on their service.



Notes



Notes



Notes



**For any additional questions, the NSEP Service
Team can be reached via email at
nsep@nsep.gov.**

Please note that any links provided to non-federal resources are
listed for your reference and do not constitute NSEP's
endorsement.

