

GUIDE TO IMPROVING THE JOA

(JOB OPPORTUNITY ANNOUNCEMENT)



OVERVIEW

The Department of Defense is the largest federal civilian employer in the United States, and DoD's ability to make a lasting, positive impression upon job seekers is an important objective in the department's hiring reform efforts. Job Opportunity Announcements (JOAs) represent many job seekers' first interaction with the Federal Government. The initial impression that these applicants receive from a JOA is critical in shaping their experience of applying for Federal employment, and may determine whether they follow the application process through to completion.

Finding the best-qualified candidates for your agency begins with clearly communicating the responsibilities and skills of the open position. This guide is designed to help JOA-writers improve their announcements by making them easier to understand and a more effective tool for filling vacancies. The guide provides recommendations and is intended to supplement existing JOA-creation practices.

Remember, the goal of a good job announcement is to provide enough information for the candidate to determine if the job is the right fit, and if so, how to apply. When it is time to create a new job announcement, or to improve an existing one, consider each section of the announcement using the guidelines, tips and examples that follow. Use plain English and common words to the greatest extent possible.

SECTION 1: JOB SUMMARY

JOB SUMMARY

The job summary is your opportunity to grab an applicant's attention. Your objectives in this section are to brand DoD and your component or agency, provide a high-level overview of the position and describe the impact of the position on your mission.

TIP

Describe qualities of the ideal applicant in addition to education and experiences. Include details regarding the ideal applicant's work style (e.g., goal-oriented) and interpersonal style (e.g., comfortable speaking in public). Be sure that efforts to attract the applicant remain aligned with the nature of the job itself, and that details are supported by the nature of the duties described.

The job summary section may be comprised of regular content, bullets or questions, taking care to ensure brevity (the maximum number of allowable characters is 2,500).

For example:

- Do you enjoy providing quality customer service?
- Can you effectively identify problems, analyze facts and make recommendations?
- Are you **TIP** effective communicator?

Put the position in context, emphasizing interesting characteristics and the experience of being in the role, not just the responsibilities of the position. Include information such as:

- Reporting structure and positions or functions with which the role interacts.
- How the position connects to the organization's strategy (i.e., why the job is important?)
- Specific goals and performance objectives of the role.

Summarize the job in three to four sentences. For example:

- This position is located in the Department of Defense, Civilian Personnel Management Service (CPMS).
- You will serve as a consultant to program managers, advising them on critical decisions.

In addition, if the JOA states there is only one vacancy, your organization is legally prohibited from hiring more than one person using that vacancy announcement. The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) recommends statements such as the following:

- One or more vacancies.
- There may be additional selections made from this vacancy announcement.

TIP

Insert a selling statement by completing the following steps at the beginning of the posting:

- Identify one or two differentiating features of the job and the hiring agency, as compared to other jobs that ideal candidates may be applying for (e.g., development opportunities, work-life balance, and location).
- Insert a specific, succinct statement describing the differentiating feature(s).
- Include persuasive evidence as available (e.g., typical career paths from the job, profiles of supervisors, employee testimonials, sample projects).
- Determine whether specific candidate groups need a tailored statement.
- Include persuasive and varied verbs throughout the posting.

SECTION 2: KEY REQUIREMENTS

KEY REQUIREMENTS

This section includes only statements regarding employment requirements, such as citizenship, education or experience requirements. For example:

- U.S. citizenship required.
- Males born after Dec. 31, 1959, must be registered for or exempt from selective service (See www.sss.gov for further guidance).
- Meet education and/or experience requirements.
- Other selective placement factors, if applicable.
- Applicant may submit a cover letter, resume and any other supporting documents.
- Individual selected must be suitable for federal employment as determined through a background investigation.
- Must be able to obtain and maintain a security clearance.

This section may also include information regarding probationary periods, security clearances, travel requirements, physical/health requirements and relocation expenses (authorized/not authorized).

DUTIES

In this section, the position should be described in terms that will enable applicants to understand what is required to do the job and to visualize whether the position is a good fit for them. The content in this section should be comprised of three to five bulleted statements and should describe typical work assignments and team composition. The statements should emphasize the value that these responsibilities bring to the team.

TIP

Emphasize details about day-to-day responsibilities by providing specific details, including:

- Typical projects.
- Resources and technologies used.
- Specific goals and performance objectives of the role.

When composing these statements, each one should begin with an action verb such as *lead*, *manage*, or *execute*. In addition, the duties should be listed in logical order and, if known, should include the percentage of time spent at each duty. For example, as a contract specialist you will:

- Work with customers to identify their needs and expectations.
- Write basic requests for proposals for services or supplies.
- Evaluate bids or proposals.
- Negotiate contracts for services or supplies.

SECTION 4: QUALIFICATIONS

QUALIFICATIONS

Qualification requirements should be explained in plain language. References and hyperlinks to OPM's *Qualifications Standards Handbook* or the qualifications standards themselves are very difficult for applicants to comprehend, having no prior knowledge of how federal hiring operates. In addition, layered statements such as "knowledge of, specialized experience in or related to [subject] ...at the next lower grade" do not add value for applicants.

Providing a clear and simple description of the job qualifications is a critical step in ensuring that an applicant understands required qualifications and can determine whether education may be substituted for experience. It is important that experience is described appropriately for each grade level on the announcement. When applications are received, it should be apparent which grade level the applicant is qualified for based on the qualifications listed for that grade level. For example:

For GS-11 level position: You must have at least one year of experience equivalent to the GS-09 grade level in the federal service. This level of experience includes performing duties such as:

- Interpreting qualification requirements for applicants and managers.
- Developing valid assessments to hire the best-qualified applicants for positions being filled.
- Conducting job analysis, determining applicant qualifications and referring eligible candidates for employment consideration.

You may substitute education for experience as follows:

Ph.D. **OR** equivalent doctoral degree, **OR** three full academic years of progressively higher-level graduate education leading to such a degree, in one or a combination of the following fields: human resources management, industrial relations, public administration, political science, business administration, psychology, labor relations, education or closely related fields.

SECTION 5: HOW YOU WILL BE EVALUATED

HOW YOU WILL BE EVALUATED

This section is designed to let applicants know how they will be evaluated. The explanation should be provided in plain language — clear, concise statements will provide applicants with the right expectations as they move through the application process. This section should identify any knowledge, skills, abilities, competencies or behaviors required for the position, focusing on key knowledge or skills needed to be successful in the position. If one or more assessments are involved, inform the applicant up front. In addition, quality categories must be defined in this section for use in Category Rating.

This section may also contain a self-assessment relating to competencies required for the position. For example (only applies to category rating):

We will review your application, including an online assessment questionnaire, to ensure that you meet the requirements to perform in this position satisfactorily. If you submit a cover letter, the information contained in the letter will not be used to determine your qualifications for the position.

If you meet the basic qualification requirements for this position, we will evaluate your application package to assess the quality, depth and complexity of your accomplishments, experience, training and education as they relate to the job. If qualified, we will then place you in one of the categories described below:

- 1. Qualified category:** Meets the minimum qualifications as described in the qualification section of this announcement.
- 2. Well-qualified category:** Meets the minimum qualification requirements and demonstrates proficiency in critical competencies, based on a panel review by subject-matter experts.
- 3. Best-qualified category:** Meets the minimum qualification requirements and excels in critical competencies, based upon a panel review by subject-matter experts.

Applicants in the best-qualified category will be referred to the selecting official for further review.

SECTION 6: HOW TO APPLY

HOW TO APPLY

This section explains when, where and how to apply, and should provide a point of contact, telephone number and email address for applicants who have questions. This section should also clearly state what needs to be included in the application package, such as VEOA and veterans' preference documentation, transcripts, documentation supporting eligibility for non-competitive appointment (e.g., severely disabled), SF-50 for proof of reinstatement, and so on. In addition, this section should inform the applicant that he or she may submit a cover letter as part of the application package that will be considered by the selecting official; however, the information contained in the cover letter is not used to evaluate an applicant's qualifications.

The use of hyperlinks is encouraged, where appropriate, as means of limiting the length of the announcements. For example:

To begin, click the **Apply Online** button and follow the prompts to register. Answer the specified questions and submit all required documents by the closing date of this announcement.

We strongly encourage you to apply online. If you cannot apply online, you may fax your resume, assessment questionnaire and supporting documents to (fax number). To be considered for this position, you will be required to submit supporting documents. Please review the following list carefully to determine which documents, if any, are required for your application and eligibility:

Required documents:

- Resume showing relevant experience (cover letter optional).
- Veterans' preference documentation (DD-214, showing character of service, or VA letter and SF-15, if claiming 10-point veterans' preference).
- Transcripts (if qualifying based on education).
- Interagency Career Transition Assistance Program/Career Transition Assistance Program (ICTAP/CTAP) eligibility.
- SF-50 for proof of reinstatement eligibility.

If you have any questions, please contact (name) at (telephone number) or by email at (name)@(agency).

SECTION 7: WHAT TO EXPECT NEXT

WHAT TO EXPECT NEXT

Finally, the JOA should tell applicants what to expect after they submit their application. For example:

After submitting your application, we will review your resume and any additional required documents to ensure you meet the basic qualification and eligibility requirements.

A list of best-qualified applicants will be referred to the selecting official. The selecting official will review the applicants and may conduct interviews and check references, and will select an applicant who is then extended a tentative job offer. If applicable, a suitability and/or security background investigation (in one to 20 days, or 40 days if an extensive investigation is required) will be conducted. A final job offer for this position is typically made within 40 days after the deadline for application.

A SPECIAL NOTE ON FORMATTING

During the process of creating a JOA, JOA-writers often use content from multiple sources. Doing so saves time; however, formatting suffers as a result. Multiple fonts, font sizes, colors and spacing result in a document that appears cobbled together and incoherent.

The following recommendations will help JOA-writers create documents with consistent, clean formatting:

- Use a single font type (e.g., Times New Roman).
- Use a single font size (e.g., 11 point).
- Ensure consistent spacing (e.g., only one space between each paragraph).
- Use bullets instead of long, dense paragraphs; ensure that each set of bullets in the announcement is formatted in the same manner.
- Use only a few colors (e.g., black font for most of the announcement, with occasional emphasis provided in red or blue).
- Ensure there is enough space in margins so announcements are visually appealing.
- Target a JOA length of three to five pages. If your JOA is longer than five pages, request assistance with identifying places where the announcement can be shortened.
- Remove organization-specific language, spell out acronyms and provide organization definitions where applicable.
- Avoid using negative statements.
- Proofread your announcement for spelling, grammar, formatting errors, inconsistencies and outdated information.
- Once the announcement is posted, look at the announcement to experience what applicants will experience. If it doesn't make sense to you, it won't make sense to them.

Once you have proofread the announcement, ask a peer to read it for clarity and comprehension.