
Your Guide to Managing the 2020 PMF Application Process



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Introduction

The Presidential Management Fellows Program (PMF) is one of several ways for current and recent students of advanced graduate degree programs to start on a career path as a public servant in the federal government. This prestigious, flagship program involves a paid two-year position with a federal agency, as well as opportunities for networking and leadership development.

In this guide, we break down the PMF application process, share helpful insights and words of advice from successful finalists and program alumni, answer frequently asked questions, and provide links to a number of helpful resources.

Please note that this is not an official resource endorsed by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) or the Executive Office of the President (EOP). Be sure to regularly check the [PMF page](#) for official updates.

The Program

History

The Presidential Management Fellows Program, originally known as the Presidential Management Interns Program, was established by President Carter's Executive Order in 1977 to attract young people with exceptional management potential into government careers. Several talented people got their start in the early years of the program, including former NASA head Sean O'Keefe and the 13th Commissioner of Social Security Kenneth Apfel.

In 1982, the program mission statement was broadened under President Reagan to attract "outstanding men and women from a variety of academic disciplines who have a clear interest in, and commitment to, a career in the analysis and management of public policies and programs."

In 2003, under the direction of President George W. Bush, the program was renamed the Presidential Management Fellows Program, to more accurately reflect the talent and professionalism of those men and women serving in the program. In 2010, the PMF became part of the Pathways Program, a hiring reform initiative designed to recruit new talent to the public sector.

Within the past two years, the program has undergone a revamp to streamline and expedite the application to placement process.

Overview

The hiring process for the United States federal government adheres to many rules and regulations that attempt to determine a candidate's quality. The PMF Program allows recent graduates to compete for jobs against other people of their relative age and experience. It also provides management training, rotations through different agencies, and competitive entry-level salaries.

While the PMF Program is an excellent opportunity to start a career in public service and sets someone up for quick advancement, the application process is also extremely competitive. Even if you are one of the approximately 400 finalists named out of roughly 6,300 applicants, you are not guaranteed a job placement.

With this in mind, it is smart for even the most qualified applicant to apply for other opportunities as well. Luckily, the PMF is not the only entry point into the federal government. It would be wise to apply to the Recent Graduates Pathways program and other positions as they are posted on USAJOBS, especially GS-7, GS-9, and GS-11 jobs.

The PMF program is a two-year commitment, during which participants are paid a full salary and benefits at the GS-9, GS-11, or GS-12 levels. Fellows can also become eligible for a promotion up to the GS-13 level during their two years with the program.



This guide will walk you through the rigorous application process and help you earn a highly sought-after spot as a fellow.

A RIGOROUS PROCESS

For the PMF Class of 2019, there were:

4,045
applicants

351
finalists

205
appointments

Participation Requirements

In order to fulfill the requirements of a PMF, all hired participants must complete the following:

- An Individual Development Plan (IDP) that outlines your training and development goals for the duration of the two-year fellowship
- Attend a minimum of 160 hours (80 hours per year) of formal interactive training, including a PMF Leadership Development Program
- Complete at least one development assignment four to six months in length
- Create a performance plan and undergo an annual performance review
- Engage in optional rotational opportunities with other offices or agencies
- Participate in OPM/PMF Program and agency-sponsored career development activities
- Be assigned and work with a senior-level mentor
- Receive Executive Resource Board (ERB or equivalent) certification that the individual has met all program requirements

Process & Eligibility

New program regulations that went into effect on July 10, 2012, under the Pathways Program strive to make it easier for students and recent graduates to find job opportunities and get experience working in the federal government. The PMF Program falls under the Pathways banner and allows graduates to apply to the program in their final year of study (graduation by August 31st), as well as for two years following the completion of their studies.

PMFs come from a variety of disciplines and graduate studies, such as master's students, PhD recipients, and law students. In addition, the program invites applicants from a wide array of backgrounds, including individuals with advanced degrees in the humanities, sciences, information technology and whatever else you've chosen as your course of study. Many graduates with non-traditional backgrounds have harnessed the PMF program to jumpstart very successful careers of service.

Hiring depends on current needs within the federal government, which vary from one year to the next. Understanding current events will help give you a sense of staffing trends.

Changes to future program eligibility will be made available on the official PMF Program website.

Schedule

The PMF program accepts applications every fall. Prospective participants are notified that applications are being accepted through an announcement from USAJOBS. Head on over to USAJOBS, set up your account, and get familiar with the system if you have not already done so. It is critical that you become familiar with the system before you begin your application to become a PMF.

Once you have completed the application, you will be prompted to complete an online assessment. Based on your score from the online assessment, you will be named a PMF Program Finalist and be eligible for a federal appointment. At that point, you will attend a virtual job fair to meet potential agencies, and a mutual selection process will (hopefully) lead you to a two-year rotational assignment.

Why PMF?

The PMF program is one of the best ways to start a public service career, because it:

- Provides exposure to several federal agencies through the built-in rotations
- Creates opportunities for making connections with peers and senior-level mentors
- Offers dependable pay and benefits with a good balance of work and personal development

PMFs also have the potential to work on projects they would never have access to in the private sector, while still enjoying the leeway to explore and find a niche in the federal government.

Other PMFs emphasize how great it looks on a resume, whether or not you accept the fellowship. You have access to great jobs and training opportunities that are unavailable to most other federal employees.

2020 APPLICATION TIMELINE

Oct. 3 – Oct. 17

The PMF Class of 2020 application will be open over a 10-day period on USAJOBS. All applicants must upload their resume, transcript, and supporting documentation for veterans' preference, Native American (Indian) preference, and/or accommodation requests. Applicants must also complete the online assessment, which includes a scored essay section. Once the 2020 application launches, an official Assessment Preparation Guide with sample questions will be made available [here](#) for applicants to review

Week of Nov. 13

If you pass the online assessment, you will be notified of your selection as a PMF Finalist.

After Finalist Notification

If you are selected as a Finalist, you will be invited to participate in the Virtual Hiring Fair, accessible through the PMF website. Finalists have one year to obtain an appointment as a PMF.

The Application

When it comes to the application process, the experts said more than anything else: “Be assertive, be creative, and make the program your own. No one has more control over their career success within the PMF program than you do.”

Your perfect PMF experience begins with the application. Since this step marks the first phase of the process, you might be tempted to complete it quickly at the eleventh hour on the due date.

The message we received from career advisors was this: do not take anything for granted during the application process! It would be a shame for a small error in the application to prevent you from moving forward.

Top 5 Tips for Completing Your Application

START EARLY. Make sure that you have given yourself enough time to complete your online application. Past applicants have reported having trouble with the online submission system, such as not being able to save attachments — problems that can be easily taken care of by starting well in advance of the deadline.

HAVE YOUR SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION READY. You will need a copy of your transcript(s). These copies can be unofficial or official. You will also need any and all documentation related to veterans’ preference, Native American (Indian) preference, and accommodations for those with disabilities.

UPDATE YOUR RESUME. For those who will be applying to work in the federal government for the first time, make sure that you know the specific details about how to correctly create a federal resume (see GovLoop’s [“How to Craft a Winning Federal Resume”](#)). This will be an essential step to make sure that federal hiring agents understand your skillset and background.

UNDERSTAND THE PMF PROGRAM. Know what your commitment will be when you are hired as a fellow, and why you are motivated to apply. This is a good opportunity to start thinking about your “elevator pitch” — quick talking points about yourself that will come in handy in later stages of the application as well.

HAVE SOMEONE REVIEW YOUR APPLICATION. This will cut down on small needless errors. Your college career advisors are good candidates, but even a peer can help you identify small mistakes or inconsistencies.

“It’s important to make sure that every step of the application is done accurately. I have several friends who would have been well-qualified, but they were not considered due to computer malfunction when submitting their initial application. If you were applying to the typical job you might be able to call and say ‘I tried to submit my resume by email, and didn’t get a response, did you receive it?’ You can’t do those types of things when you’re applying for PMF. You need to be a lot more detail-oriented in this application than you do in others.”

Kaleigh Emerson

PMF Class of 2010

PMF RESUME CHEAT SHEET

The Basics:

- Your resume can be in any format or style, but the file size cannot exceed 3MB per file. **The resume must include the following, at minimum:** applicant name, contact information (address, email, phone number), college/university name, and qualifying degree program (completed or pursuing). You also have the option of creating and submitting a resume through the USAJobs resume builder.
- **There is no length requirement.** Take as many pages as you need to explain how your background and experience maps to the job requirements.
- Tailor your resume to the **seven core PMF competencies:** adaptability, integrity, motivation to serve, problem solving, interpersonal skills, oral communication, and written communication. If you are named a finalist, you will have the opportunity to modify your resume for specific job positions.
- **Format your resume** with similar headings and sections as those on USAJobs since most agencies are already familiar with this layout. We also recommend that you make the information in your resume as easy to read as possible. Include bullets and structure each section in an outline format.
- Applicants should **not include photos** on their resumes

Education

- List your educational experiences in **chronological order**, beginning with the most recent.
- **Include any** honors, relevant coursework, licensures and certifications that directly apply to government work.
- **Detail scholarships and fellowships.** Describe each briefly to give hiring managers a sense of the purpose and significance of the award.

Experience

- List your volunteer and paid professional experiences in **chronological order**, beginning with the most recent.
- Provide the **name and contact information** of your supervisor for each assignment.
- Remember that **you don't have to list everything.** Focus on the experiences that are most relevant and portray who you are as a candidate and professional.
- **Focus on content:** try using the CAR (Context, Action, Result) strategy when discussing your accomplishments. Also highlight any knowledge, skills, or abilities that you gained through the experience.
- Include **quantity references** when possible (i.e. managed a \$X million project, taught X students, etc.)
- **Highlight results.** Explain how you saved time or money, met deadlines, and worked efficiently to achieve tangible results.

References

- It is generally a good idea to provide **two to three references** at the end of your resume. These can be personal, professional, or academic contacts.
- **For each reference**, include their title, contact information (phone and email), and the type of reference (i.e. personal, professional, academic).
- These references **do not have to be different** from those listed as supervisors in the experience section. If an agency needs more references, they will ask you.
- Remember that the PMF Program **will not read or consider** letters of recommendation.

The Online Assessment

As you sit down to complete the online assessment, take a moment and make sure that you have the proper system and browser requirements. This is especially important for Mac users, who should complete the assessment using Internet Explorer. For additional details regarding system and browser requirements please refer to [OPM's official guide](#).

The PMF online assessment is administered in an un-proctored environment and includes four batteries, or sections:

- 1. Situational Judgment**
- 2. Life Experience**
- 3. Critical Thinking Skills**
- 4. A scored essay to measure writing ability**

Each battery is timed, but you are free to take breaks in between sections. You may review all answers at the end of each section during the time allotted. However, once you complete and submit a battery or once the timer has expired, you cannot go back and modify your answers.

OPM estimates that it takes **two to three hours** to complete the entire application. Take that time seriously. OPM also suggests that you do it all in one sitting. We'd second that notion as well. Block out three hours in a quiet place without interruptions so that you can focus.

"What the PMF is looking for are collaborative team-builders. What they are not looking for are alpha personalities. I have seen some outstanding candidates who I knew were strong personalities get knocked out in the first round. I probably know about forty or forty-five PMFs, and with one exception, every single one of them is not an alpha personality."

Career Advisor

ESSAY PRO TIP

For your essay, it's a good idea to copy and paste them from a word processing software into the online assessment. This is smart for two reasons:

- ① The essay has a minimum and maximum length allotted. This number includes spacing and punctuation. Track your progress using your word processing software.**
- ② You may want to keep a copy of your essay if you move on to the Finalist round so you can refer to your answers before any future hiring interviews.**

Tips from Successful Applicants

"I didn't do any formal preparation for the online assessment. I was told that you shouldn't try to overthink it - they said your best bet was just to answer honestly and go with your gut. All I did was make sure I set aside enough time and did it in a place I felt comfortable and could concentrate."

Pat Hodgens

PMF Class of 2013

"Many of the questions were repeated in slightly different ways to see if you would answer consistently. It felt like I was getting everything 'wrong' but realistically there was probably no wrong answer. Many had an obvious answer as well: if you are able to work well with others and perform well on the job. I know some of my fellow applicants at my university did not take the assessment very seriously and then were surprised they did not make it through the process. I really applied myself and was successful at being selected."

Elizabeth Fischer

PMF Class of 2011

"The only thing you know for sure is that they are looking for leadership qualities. Just be honest. One of our online assessments was personality leadership. I'm not sure what it tested. We answered a lot of strange questions that you couldn't prepare for - they weren't knowledge-based so you just have to trust that you are a good candidate and answer those questions honestly."

Ashley Cassels

PMF Class of 2010

"I did not do a whole lot of prep for [the online assessment]. We did receive a little practice guide that had a couple questions. I went through that multiple times. A former PMF suggested going through the LSAT practice book, so I did read through that. It was helpful to get me in that logical frame of mind. [My advice is to] just go sit in a library for an afternoon and read through the LSAT practice book to get the gist of how you're supposed to be thinking on the logic portion of the assessment."

Kaleigh Emerson

PMF Class of 2010

Becoming a Finalist

If you obtain the required score on the online assessment and are selected as a finalist, you will be invited to participate in the Virtual Hiring Fair for the Class of 2020 finalists. Notification of your finalist status will be sent via email in mid-November.

Once you have been named a finalist, you now have to get hired into a PMF position, pass a background investigation, go through the agency's onboarding process, and obtain a security clearance, if applicable. Keep in mind that this can be a lengthy process. It can take several months to pass a federal background — and that's after you've secured a position.

OPM highly recommends that finalists review the common Standard Form (SF) used by federal agencies, the SF 85, Questionnaire for Non-Sensitive Persons. Finalists should start collecting the requested data and background information ahead of time. (But keep in mind that some federal agencies may require agency-specific forms.)

PMF Program Coordinators strongly suggest that candidates view the [Talent Management System \(TMS\)](#) for available positions for PMF Finalists. The TMS is a way for agencies to advertise available PMF appointments and is only for current PMF finalists. Check frequently as new positions are posted and change often throughout the year.

The Virtual Hiring Fair

The PMF Hiring Fair is where finalists begin the process of finding their federal appointment. In the past, the Hiring Fair was held in Washington, DC as a traditional, in-person event. However, this event became a Virtual Hiring Fair in Spring 2015. You can use the fair to learn more about agencies to inform your decision-making process and meet agency representatives that participate in the event. Once the 2020 PMF finalists are selected, visit the [Hiring Event Resources](#) page for an overview, finalist checklist, list of FAQs, list of participating agencies, and list of current Agency PMF coordinators.

Before the Fair

There are a few important steps you can take before the Hiring Fair. Below we've listed five of them:

1. RESEARCH AGENCIES THAT INTEREST YOU.

Let's face it: government's big. Your options are immense. You will want to learn as much as you can about prospective agencies in advance so that you can chat knowledgeably with their representative at the fair.

2. CONSIDER AGENCY SIZE, ITS MISSION, AND THE EXPERIENCE YOU HOPE TO GAIN.

At smaller agencies you may have the opportunity to make more immediate impact and receive leadership opportunities, but you may not have as many resources (training, technology, fellow PMFs) available to you. At larger agencies you may have all the resources you need, but you may not get the immediate leadership opportunities.

3. PRIORITIZE YOUR TOP PICKS, BUT REMAIN OPEN-MINDED.

Once you've done your homework on your favorite agencies, it's always a good practice to rank them in the order of where you most want to work. Don't just think about your placement, but where you might want to spend your career.

4. DON'T WAIT FOR THE FAIR TO MAKE CONTACT.

If you show up to the job fair and expect to engage with the State Department or other big agencies, you will be too late. Ask your career counselor for contact information for the agency coordinators or past PMFs from your school who have a connection with that agency.

5. GET YOUR PROFESSIONAL HOUSE IN ORDER.

Ask your Career Services advisor or other trusted person to review your resume (make sure your resume is free of grammatical and typographical errors). Make sure your resume tells a coherent story. Even if you've done a lot of different things, help recruiters find the thread. A couple introductory bullets at the top can make all the difference.

Try to schedule your most sought after interviews ahead of time. Check the Talent Management System website for PMF positions that may interest you. Email and/or call the designated point of contact (this is not always the PMF Agency Coordinator) for any PMF position for which you wish to interview, as spots are limited.

Acing the Virtual Fair

Follow these tips to stand out from the crowd.



Complete your profile.

Upload a photo or avatar, as well as your resume and all contact information.



Be enthusiastic.

The best way to stand out is to express sincere interest in the agency and positions, and have a clear reason why you're applying.



Be responsive.

Recruiters are busy. With the expected number of participants, they have a hard time responding to every person in the virtual fair chats. To grab and keep their attention, respond to any contact in a timely manner. Be clear and concise with your questions and answers.



Make time for direct engagement.

The most valuable part of the career fair is interacting with agency representatives. Hone in on the ones you want to speak with.



Make the interaction meaningful.

Ask outside the box questions, while avoiding questions that you could easily answer on your own with a bit of online searching.



Network!

Take advantage of the "who's here" functionality in the virtual show. This is the perfect time to speak with other finalists in your cohort.



Budget your time.

Be prepared to spend more than an hour in the virtual show. Between speaking with agency reps and viewing educational components of each booth, you'll need significant time at the fair.



Be professional.

Remember that you are chatting with agency representatives (people in control of your future!) and not your best friend on g-chat. Don't use abbreviations or slang and be sure to check your spelling.



Don't pester.

If agency reps are taking a few minutes to respond to your question, don't keep messaging the recruiters. They see your message and will respond when they can.

The Job Offer

Managing the virtual fair is tricky, but the real work comes in managing the job offers. It's important to keep in mind that you have one full year to find a placement as a finalist — and it can take anywhere from a few days after an interview, right up to the one year mark. Most offers are received two to three months after an interview.

Once the offers start coming, we recommend that you not accept the first job offer unless you have taken the time to do some due diligence about the job first. Probably the biggest mistake people make is to get really excited about getting a job offer and then accept it right away.

It's pretty important to do a lot of research about the position, agency, etc. Many people accept offers without meeting their new direct supervisor. Unsurprisingly, a lot of them are unhappy in their positions now.

This seems obvious, but a lot of PMFs get caught up in the excitement of the fair and getting job offers, and neglect to make sure what the work environment is really going to be like. Below are some more helpful tips.

- **Ask for some time to consider the offer and be considerate of the agency's time.** If you are offered a job, but you have more interviews scheduled, the offering agency would understand if you requested some additional time to respond.
- **Give a timeframe and stick to it.** Be respectful of an agency's desire to acquire as close to their top choice as possible. If you know immediately or sooner than agreed upon that you do not intend to accept, let them know as soon as possible.
- **BUT if you really wanted that one from the outset, go for it!** If you receive an offer from an agency you are genuinely interested in working for, and you are impressed by their PMF Program and the type of work you will be doing there as a fellow, accept the offer. Then inform other agencies where you have applied that you accepted another offer so that they can extend offers to other Finalists.
- **Don't be shy — call if you want to learn the results.** If you haven't heard from the organization that is your first choice, then call and ask if you have made their final list.
- **Get a sense of security (clearances, that is):** If you're offered a position that requires a security clearance that you don't have yet, understand that you may have to wait a year or more! Definitely get another job in the meantime, so you can afford to eat while you wait.

Once you have received your appointment, the PMF Coordinator for your agency will update your status online and provide a start date for your fellowship. Once a finalist accepts a tentative appointment offer, he or she should complete the OPM Form 1306, PMF Appointment Intake Form as soon as possible (found under the [Become a PMF—Resources page](#)).

You will still need to clear a background check and complete your graduate studies to begin your position as a Presidential Management Fellow.

Additional Resources

Please join us in the [PathtoPMF.com discussion thread](#) to share your experiences and ask any further questions that you may have regarding the PMF selection process!

**Official Presidential Management
Fellows Program**
www.pmf.gov

Path to PMF Website
www.pathtopmf.com

PMF Listserv
listserv.opm.gov/wa.exe?SUBED1=PMF&A=1

**Government Pathways for Students and
Recent Graduates**
www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/hiring-information/students-recent-graduates/

**National Association of Schools of Public
Affairs and Administration (NASPAA)**
www.naspaa.org

Presidential Management Alumni Group
www.pmag.org/pmf_resources.htm

About GovLoop

GovLoop's mission is to inspire public sector professionals by serving as the knowledge network for government. GovLoop connects more than 300,000 members, fostering cross-government collaboration, solving common problems and advancing government careers. GovLoop is headquartered in Washington, D.C., with a team of dedicated professionals who share a commitment to the public sector.

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